

**Wednesday  
13 April 2016**

**Volume 608  
No. 142**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 13 April 2016**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 13 April 2016*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### WALES

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Economy

1. **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of steps taken to rebalance the economy in Wales. [904360]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** As the economy continues to grow, this one nation Government are ambitious for every part of the UK. In Wales, we are regenerating the south-east with a city deal for the Cardiff capital region. We intend to follow suit with a deal for Swansea in the west, and we have opened the door to a growth deal for north Wales.

**Julian Sturdy:** May I be the first to welcome the Secretary of State and the Minister to their new roles?

Following the announcement of the north Wales growth deal in the Budget, what plans are there for the deal to be genuinely cross-border and to plug into the northern powerhouse, which has the potential to deliver huge benefits throughout the north, not only for the distinct regions like north Wales but for God's own county of Yorkshire?

**Alun Cairns:** As well as seeking to grow the economy across the United Kingdom, all the way to Yorkshire and beyond, we are seeking to move our dependency in Wales from the south-eastern part of the country. Less than two weeks ago, I was in north Wales talking to local authority leaders, businesses and business groups, all of whom were keen to support the north Wales growth deal. It was interesting to note that they called for the deal to take place on a cross-border basis, extending to Cheshire and the Wirral, to ensure that north Wales was plugged into the northern powerhouse.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Given the importance of north Wales, will the Secretary of State press very hard for the establishment of links to Manchester airport and rail links to enable people to benefit from HS2, and would I, as a north Wales MP, be able to vote on such measures?

**Alun Cairns:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the new cross-border taskforce is making a bid for control period 6 funding from the Department for Transport with the aim of improving links with north Wales. Franchise negotiations are taking place between the Welsh and United Kingdom Governments, and we are determined to ensure that Members are represented properly in those negotiations.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend to his position. As he said, the Budget contained excellent news for north Wales in the form of the growth deal announcement, which recognises the region's close association with the north-west of England, but does he agree that maximising the benefit will require at least an element of political devolution to north Wales?

**Alun Cairns:** My right hon. Friend speaks with authority and knowledge of this issue. Devolution to north Wales from what is seen in many quarters as the remoteness of Cardiff Bay is essential. The community groups whom I met in north Wales, whether they were from the north-west, from the border or from the English side of the boundary, wanted the growth deal to work on a cross-border basis, and I am determined to explore that possibility in the interests of the region.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): One of the most effective ways of rebalancing the economy is to empower the Welsh Government by giving them the necessary job creation levers, which is why I welcome moves to increase fiscal empowerment for Wales. If fiscal devolution is to work, however, it must be facilitated by the provision of a genuinely no-detriment fiscal framework. The SNP Scottish Government have negotiated such a framework for their country. What is the Secretary of State's preferred deduction method for Wales?

**Alun Cairns:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the plans in the draft Wales Bill for the granting of income tax-varying powers for the Welsh Government. We want Wales to be a low-tax economy. Of course, mechanisms will need to be introduced to protect Welsh interests. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that I met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury earlier this week to discuss early proposals for such mechanisms, and we are happy to engage in further such discussions.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Which sectors of the Welsh economy offer the most exciting prospects for growth to help to rebalance the economy, and what steps is my right hon. Friend taking to encourage them?

**Alun Cairns:** As my hon. Friend will know, the Budget focused on the city deal for Cardiff, which is the largest city deal in the United Kingdom, with £1.2 billion covering 10 local authority areas. However, we also have ambitions for the Swansea bay city deal and the north Wales growth deal. We need to remember that this involves UK taxpayers' money in addition to the Barnett block, which is something that we never saw when Labour was in power.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): North Wales growth is interdependent on growth in the Republic of Ireland as well as in England. Will the Secretary of State—and I

welcome both him and the Under-Secretary of State to their new positions—ensure that north Wales Labour Members are provided with some details of the so-called partnership, given that we are the partners from north Wales?

**Alun Cairns:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind words and support.

We are determined to work on that issue. There has been a bottom-up approach on the growth deal. We have met local authority leaders and businesses from north Wales, and we are determined to pursue that further. I am not sure that I can make the growth deal stretch as far as Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but I would be interested to try to take it across the English border.

### Severn Crossings: Tolls

2. **Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on people in Wales of the Government's decision to reduce tolls on the Severn crossings. [904361]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** This Government's commitment to halve the Severn crossings toll is a major boost for the economy and people of south Wales. It will make a positive difference to commuters and small business owners and demonstrates our continued determination to rebalance the economy.

**Simon Hoare:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. I also welcome him to his place. It seems only a moment or so ago that we were competing to be the parliamentary candidate for the then safe Labour seat of Gower, which was some years ago.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reduction in the tolls will also hugely benefit the Welsh tourism sector by encouraging people to come to Wales, and that it is time for the Welsh Government to pull their finger out and deliver the investment and improvements to the M4 corridor?

**Alun Cairns:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words. It is fair to say that there are no infrastructure projects more important to the south Wales economy than the upgrade of the M4 around Newport. It is hard to believe that our noble Friend Lord Hague was Secretary of State for Wales when a commitment to that was first made, only for it to be cancelled twice by the Labour party when it was in government. Business has called for it; commuters have called for it; visitors have called for it. The Chancellor made money available specifically for this project almost three years ago. We just wish the Welsh Government would get on with it.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs found that the operational and maintenance costs of the bridge represented a quarter of the toll, yet, as the bridge goes into public hands, the Government have reduced the toll by half and are therefore creating a 100% margin. When will they reduce the toll to the level of the operational and maintenance costs to give south Wales and the Welsh economy every chance of performing as well as anywhere else, rather than having this stranglehold on it?

**Alun Cairns:** I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman, like business groups, be it the Federation of Small Businesses, the chambers of commerce or the Institute of Directors, would welcome the halving of the tolls. We saw no action in that regard from the Labour party when it was in government. However, we have gone further than just halving the Severn tolls. A small goods vehicle, for example, will move from the current rate of £13.20 to less than £4 when the tolls are halved, because we are also removing the second-class toll.

13. [904372] **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): The announcement by this Conservative Government of the cut in tolls is hugely welcome. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that in the longer term the revenue generated from the tolls should not exceed the cost of maintaining the two Severn bridges?

**Alun Cairns:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his diligent and persistent campaigning on the issue. I know that he was absolutely delighted when the Chancellor was able to respond to his and many other Conservative colleagues' requests. Of course, a debt will remain on the tolls even when the bridges come back into public ownership in 2018 or thereabouts. That debt will still need to be serviced, as will the innovations on free-flowing traffic that we want to introduce.

**Nia Griffith** (Llanelli) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State and the Minister on their recent appointments. Labour Members look forward to working constructively with them, particularly on the new Wales Bill, whenever that may appear.

To clarify, in last month's Budget the Chancellor made much of halving the tolls on the Severn crossings, but as we have since discovered that is not quite the bargain it appears to be. The 50% discount includes the 20% of VAT, which disappears anyway when the bridge reverts to public ownership, and of course businesses reclaim VAT. So instead of leaving businesses still paying thousands of pounds a year, why will not the Government do the right thing and scrap these tolls altogether?

**Alun Cairns:** We have an election coming and the call from the Labour party is now very different—it is very convenient. It has long called for the devolution of the tolls, but we were fearful that, as soon as the tolls were devolved, they would be used as a cash cow to support the income of the Welsh Government.

### Employment Trends

3. **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of employment trends in Wales. [904362]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** The labour market in Wales has never been stronger. Although we recognise the challenges facing the Welsh economy, there is a lot to celebrate. Unemployment has fallen to its lowest since 2008 and the number of people in work in Wales is at an all-time high.

**Mark Pawsey:** I welcome the Minister to his position. He is quite rightly focusing on the issues affecting steel production at Port Talbot, but what assessment has he made of the decision by Aston Martin to build its new DBX car at St Athan?

**Guto Bebb:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight that success story. It is a success story for all of the United Kingdom. It is an investment in St Athan, in Wales and in Britain, creating 750 highly skilled jobs in Wales and the west midlands, and I am very grateful to the Prime Minister and to Michael Fallon for the work that they have put into achieving that success.

**Mr Speaker:** I think that the hon. Gentleman was referring to the Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon). Some name was mentioned, but it does not mean anything in the Chamber.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab):** Since 2012, Jobs Growth Wales has helped 15,000 people into meaningful employment. Given that youth unemployment is falling faster in Wales than in the UK as a whole, does the Minister agree that the UK Government could learn from the Welsh Labour Government in this regard?

**Guto Bebb:** It is interesting to note that an independent audit of Jobs Growth Wales has highlighted that some 80% of its spending has been inefficient. However, it is important to point out that successful jobs creation in Wales is dependent on co-operation between the two Governments, which is exactly what we saw in relation to Aston Martin.

11. [904370] **Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** My hon. Friend will know that tourism is a major employer. Will he take this opportunity of paying tribute to Andrew R. T. Davies, the leader of the Conservatives in the Welsh Assembly, and to Anthony Pickles for coming up with the idea of bringing the Prince of Wales's regalia to Wales? Will he also praise the Prince of Wales for following up on that idea? What discussions is the Minister having with the Welsh Government to promote this?

**Guto Bebb:** I will of course join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the leader of the Welsh Conservatives. It is important to highlight the importance of tourism to the Welsh economy, and bringing the regalia back to Wales is the right thing to do. I am certain that the castle of Conwy in my constituency would be delighted to host them.

**Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab):** Does the Minister think that his colleagues' plan to sack hundreds of civil servants in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in Cardiff will help or hinder employment trends in Wales?

**Guto Bebb:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question, but she will be aware that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on a leaked report. The key thing that we need to be aware of is that wherever in Wales we look—north, south, west or east—we are seeing employment growth.

14. [904373] **Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** I welcome my hon. Friend to his new position and congratulate him on his new job. Does he agree that the reductions to business taxes announced in the Budget and the ability of people to keep more of their own earnings will create an environment in which the private

sector can invest and in which employment opportunities can come to Wales in the same way as they do to the rest of the country?

**Guto Bebb:** I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The tax cuts that have been put in place by this Government since 2010 are to be welcomed. Of particular importance in the Budget was the announcement on small business rates, and I call on the Welsh Government to follow the example of the Westminster Government to ensure that Welsh small businesses have the same advantages through their business rates as do those in England.

**Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab):** Only 38% of working-age disabled people are in jobs in Wales, compared with 46% in the UK as a whole. Why?

**Guto Bebb:** The right hon. Lady asks an important question. There is more work to be done and, again, there is a need to work together on this issue. However, I would highlight the fact that more and more people with disabilities are now in work—152,000 more in the past 12 months and over 300,000 more in the past 24 months. We need to ensure that the successes we are seeing across the country are replicated in Wales.

### Steel Industry

4. **Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con):** What assessment he has made of risks to the future of the steel industry in Wales. [904363]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** The steel industry is currently dealing with unparalleled global economic conditions and the UK is deeply concerned by the social and economic impact that they are having in south Wales. While we cannot change the status of the global steel market, our objective remains to overcome the challenges and play a positive role in achieving a sustainable future for the steel industry in Wales and across the UK.

**Tom Pursglove:** I thank the Minister for that answer. Does he agree that in order to secure the future not only of the Port Talbot site but of Tata sites around the UK, no option should be ruled out?

**Alun Cairns:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the way in which he has represented the interests of his constituents and of those who depend on steelmaking in his area. He recognises the way in which the plants are interlinked and he has been working closely with the Business Secretary and me to help to support a secure future. I can reassure him that no stone will be left unturned to secure a long-term future for the Corby plant as well as for every other plant across the UK.

**Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC):** I welcome the Secretary of State and his deputy to their new positions and assure you, Sir, that I will endeavour to give them ample opportunity to explain themselves after my questions. Why did the Secretary of State not travel to Mumbai for the Tata board meeting of 29 March?

**Alun Cairns:** The Government have been in close dialogue with Tata steel for many months. My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary was at Tata the

month before the Mumbai meeting and had engaged with its directors well before that. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be grateful that as a result of the Government's actions we managed to avert the immediate closure of the plant and propose a sale.

**Hywel Williams:** I will give the Secretary of State another go. Did he fail to attend the meeting because a more senior Cabinet colleague told him not to do so? Did he decide not to go off his own bat? Or was it more down to the fact that, as the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise said of her boss the Business Secretary to the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs yesterday,

“He would not have gone to Australia had he known that they were going to close the ruddy works?”

What stopped our Secretary of State? Was it the Cabinet's pecking order, was it indolence, or was it just plain ignorance?

**Alun Cairns:** I am disappointed with the hon. Gentleman's approach. Steelworkers want to see Government and Opposition, and the unions and the company, work together to secure a long-term future. The Government have been in a long-term dialogue, which is demonstrated by the ongoing sales process, as opposed to the plant facing the risk of immediate closure.

**Byron Davies (Gower) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he and the Wales Office will work with all relevant Government Departments to ensure the long-term future of Port Talbot, particularly for the workers who live in my constituency?

**Alun Cairns:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend. He met the Business Secretary last week, and he and I have had several conversations about support for his constituents who depend on the plant, demonstrating its regional impact. The Government are determined to do everything possible to secure a long-term, viable future for the plant.

**Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab):** As the Secretary of State well knows, at sites across Wales, such as Shotton, Llanwern, Orb, Trostre and Port Talbot, Tata steelworkers produce a whole range of specialist products. What assurances has he obtained from Tata that it will not siphon off the production of the most profitable lines to their plants abroad? What guarantees has he received that the intellectual property will remain with the Welsh operations in order to attract a suitable buyer and safeguard thousands of Welsh jobs?

**Alun Cairns:** The hon. Lady makes an important point about the sale of the operations in the United Kingdom, which demonstrates the positive engagement between the UK Government and Tata Steel that has resulted in its decision to sell off all its operations, rather than simply to dispose of what some might see as the more profitable assets.

### Steel Industry: Government Support

5. **Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab):** What steps the Government are taking to support the steel industry in Wales. [904364]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** We have been in extensive discussions with Tata for months, and it is due to Government intervention that Tata has agreed to a sales process rather than an immediate closure of its operations in Wales. I spoke to the hon. Gentleman before he went to the Tata meeting in Mumbai and have spoken to him since. I am keen to stay in regular contact in order to update him as the position changes. [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. These are important matters affecting the livelihoods of tens of thousands of people in Wales and across the country. Let us have some respect for that fact without Ministers wittering away—Mr Evennett—in the background. Important matters are being discussed. Be quiet, sir!

**Stephen Kinnock:** The Secretary of State will know that retaining the order book and customer base is critical for the Welsh steel industry. I want a short answer to a short question. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether he has had conversations with customers such as Honda, Nissan and Jaguar Land Rover to secure the integrity of the customer base? Yes or no.

**Alun Cairns:** My father was a welder at the Port Talbot plant for more than 30 years before he was made redundant several years ago. I am from that community and understand how important the steelworks is to the income of the area. My family has been through the good times when records have been broken and the difficult times when my father, like many others, was made redundant. The Government regularly engage with many of the companies, both suppliers and customers, that work with Tata. We are determined to do everything to support them.

**Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab):** Yesterday, the Business Secretary said we need to work together, cross-party, on this, and the Secretary of State for Wales has just said the same. I understand that he is to visit Shotton on Monday—when was he intending to tell me?

**Alun Cairns:** I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman would be grateful for, or approving of, a visit from a UK Minister to Shotton. I have been responding to the calls from the local workers, but I was in Wrexham on the day that the news broke about Shotton, and I spoke to community leaders and business leaders about the impact. I said to the community, “As soon as more information becomes available, I will return.” That is why I am returning to Shotton next Monday, and I am pleased about it.

### EU Membership: Economy

6. **Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the economic effect on Wales of UK membership of the EU. [904365]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** The European Union makes a massive contribution to the Welsh economy: it is our largest trading partner; it supports thousands of jobs; and it

provides significant investments for projects all around Wales. The economic benefits of a reformed EU are far too great to risk leaving.

**Nic Dakin:** I thank the Minister for that answer. He is absolutely right; the Welsh economy depends on EU funding to a large extent. Does he agree that remaining in the EU is vital for training and employment opportunities in Wales and across the UK?

**Guto Bebb:** I fully endorse the comments the hon. Gentleman has made. The funding from the EU has been significant in re-skilling the Welsh workforce to a very high extent and the support given by the EU to higher education institutions is phenomenal.

**Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD):** Small family farms remain the backbone of the west Wales rural economy, but incomes have declined by £5,000 over the past two years. Does the Minister share the concerns of the Farmers Union of Wales, the National Farmers Union and many in the rural economy that the last thing we need to countenance is withdrawal from the European Union?

**Guto Bebb:** I entirely endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments. Both farming unions in Wales—the FUW and the NFU—are strongly in favour of our remaining in the reformed European Union. The extent of Welsh agricultural produce that is exported to the EU shows how important that market is; 90% of Welsh agricultural produce is exported to the EU and we should not risk losing that.

**Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab):** On this point, the Minister is absolutely right. The best decision for Wales is to stay in the European Union, as our favourite pamphlet says. But can he tell us why, at a time when Sir Terry Matthews, Airbus, NFU Cymru and the FUW support our membership, Andrew R. T. Davies, the person the Conservative party wants to be First Minister of Wales, wants Wales out of the EU? It is a disgrace, is it not? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** I think we got the gist of it.

**Guto Bebb:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight the support of Airbus, Horizon Nuclear Power and the farming unions, but I make this point to her: the Conservative party is a democratic party that believes passionately that the people who can make a decision about this issue are the people of this country. We have offered them a referendum and their votes will result in a decision in 10 weeks' time.

### Disabled People: Employment

7. **Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of support for employment for disabled people in Wales. [904366]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** The Government believe every disabled person who wants to work should be able to work. As announced in the spending review, there will be a real-terms

spending increase on supporting disabled people into work. That will ensure that valuable talent and skill will be further recognised in the Welsh workforce. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are discussing the situation of disabled people in Wales.

**Debbie Abrahams:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Disability rights organisations, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and many others have decried the lack of evidence in support of the Government's cutting £1,500 a year from disabled people who have been found not fit for work. How many employers in Wales have the Government signed up as active Disability Confident employers for those disabled people who are fit for work?

**Guto Bebb:** It is important to point out, first, that supporting disabled people into the workplace is incredibly important, and this Government have a track record of success. Over the past 12 months, we have seen 150,000 disabled people enter the workplace; the figure is more than 300,000 over the past 24 months. I am proud of the fact that Swansea is the first disabled-friendly city in the UK, supporting disabled people into employment. On the specific numbers, I will write to the hon. Lady with the details that she requests.

**Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP):** Will the Minister concede that with more than a third of work capability assessment appeals being successful, Government policy is damaging the lives of a great many disabled people and starving them of money that they need in order to live a reasonable quality of life?

**Guto Bebb:** Although the work capability assessments need to be refined and are being refined, it is crucial to highlight the fact that this Government strongly believe that people who are disabled and who want to work and are able to work have a contribution to make. The aim of this Government's policies is to help people into employment where that is possible, and the figures show that our policies are successful.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Finally—patience rewarded—I call Mr Ian Lucas.

**Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab):** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I welcome the Minister to his post. Is he aware that the callous policy of the Conservative Government of implementing personal independence payments is leading to many people being prevented from working because Motability cars are being taken away from them, which prevents them from being able to travel to work? Will he speak to the Prime Minister, who is sitting next to him, to try to talk some sense into him?

**Guto Bebb:** I find the hon. Gentleman's comments slightly disappointing. When he looks at all the changes in the employment situation in his constituency, he should welcome this Government's work on welfare reform. The welfare reform changes that we are putting in place are contributing to behavioural change, leading to more people supporting their own families and

contributing to the economy. When he looks at the statistics for the Wrexham constituency, he should welcome the changes, instead of condemning them.

## PRIME MINISTER

### *The Prime Minister was asked—* Engagements

Q1. [904325] **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 13 April.

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

**Wendy Morton:** Last week in Aldridge-Brownhills I visited Laserform manufacturing and Potclays, who supplied clay for the Tower of London poppies. Does my right hon. Friend agree that supporting small businesses and the further increase in personal income tax allowance, which came in this month, show that, unlike Labour, the Conservative party is the party of enterprise and aspiration and believes in enabling hard-working people to keep more of the money they earn?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me join my hon. Friend in congratulating the firms that she mentions. She is right that it is predominantly small and medium-sized businesses that will be providing the jobs of the future. We want people to keep more of their own money to spend as they choose. That is why the historic move last week to an £11,000 personal allowance means that by 2018 people will be paying about £1,000 less per taxpayer and we will have taken 4 million of the lowest-paid people out of tax altogether. That is the action of a progressive Conservative Government.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I am sure the whole House will join me in mourning the death today of the dramatist Arnold Wesker, one of the great playwrights of this country, one of those wonderful angry young men of the 1950s who, like so many angry young people, changed the face of our country.

Yesterday the European Commission announced new proposals on country-by-country tax reporting, so that companies must declare where they make their profits in the European Union and in blacklisted tax havens. Conservative MEPs voted against the proposal for country-by-country reporting and against the blacklisting. Can the Prime Minister now assure us that Conservative MEPs will support the new proposal?

**The Prime Minister:** First, let me join the right hon. Gentleman in mourning the loss of the famous playwright, with all the work that he did. He is right to mention that.

Let me welcome the country-by-country tax reporting proposal put forward by Commissioner Jonathan Hill, who was appointed by this Government as the United Kingdom Commissioner. That is very much based on the work that we have been doing, leading the collaboration

between countries and making sure that we share tax information. As we discussed on Monday, this has gone far faster and far further under this Government than under any previous Government.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** If the proposals were put forward by the British Government, why did Conservative MEPs vote against them? There seems to be a sort of disconnect there. The Panama papers exposed the scandalous situation where wealthy individuals seemed to believe that corporation tax and other taxes are optional. Indeed, as the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) informed us, they are apparently only for “low achievers”. When Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs says that the tax gap is £34 billion, why is the Prime Minister cutting HMRC staff by 20% and shutting down tax offices, losing the expertise of the people who could close that tax gap?

**The Prime Minister:** I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman wants to get on to our responsibilities to pay our taxes, which I think is very important. I thought that his tax return was a metaphor for Labour policy: it was late, it was chaotic, it was inaccurate and it was uncoded. Turning to his specific questions, he is absolutely right to identify the tax gap. That is why we closed off loopholes in the last Parliament equivalent to £12 billion, and we aim to close off loopholes in this Parliament equivalent to £16 billion. HMRC is taking very strong action, backed by this Government, backed by the Chancellor and legislated for by this House. I think that I am right in saying that since 2010 we have put over £1 billion into HMRC to increase its capabilities to collect the tax that people should be paying. The difference between those on the Government Benches and the right hon. Gentleman is that we believe in setting low tax rates and encouraging people to pay them, and it is working.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I am grateful to the Prime Minister for drawing attention to my own tax return, which is there to see, warts and all—the warts being my handwriting, and the all being my generous donation to HMRC. I actually paid more tax than some companies owned by people he might know quite well. He is not cutting tax abuse; he is cutting down on tax collectors. The tax collected helps to fund our NHS and all the other services. Last month, the Office for Budget Responsibility reported that HMRC does not have the necessary resources to tackle offshore tax disclosures. The Government are committed to taking £400 million out of HMRC’s budget by 2020. Will he now commit to reversing that cut so that we can collect the tax that will help to pay for the services?

**The Prime Minister:** I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman’s figures, rather like his tax return, are not entirely accurate. At the summer Budget in 2015 we gave an extra £800 million to HMRC to fund additional work to tackle tax evasion and non-compliance between now and 2021. That will enable HMRC to recover a cumulative £7.2 billion in tax over the next five years. We have already brought in more than £2 billion from offshore tax evaders since 2010. The point that I will make to him is that I think we should try to bring some consensus to this issue. For years in this country, Labour and Conservative Governments had an attitude to the Crown dependencies and overseas territories that their

tax affairs were a matter for them, their compliance affairs were a matter for them and their transparency was a matter for them. This Government have changed that. We got the overseas territories and Crown dependencies round the table and we said, “You’ve got to have registers of ownership, you’ve got to collaborate with the UK Government and you’ve got to ensure that people do not hide their taxes.” And that is what is happening. So when he gets to his feet, he should welcome the fact that huge progress has been made, raising taxes, sorting out the overseas territories and Crown dependencies, closing the tax gap, getting businesses to pay more and providing international leadership on this whole issue—all things that never happened under Labour.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank the Prime Minister for that answer. The only problem with it is that the Red Book states that HMRC spending will fall from £3.3 billion to £2.9 billion by 2020. With regard to the UK Crown dependencies and overseas territories, only two days ago the Prime Minister said that he had agreed that they will provide UK law enforcement and tax agencies with full access to information on the beneficial ownership of companies. There seems to be some confusion here, because the Chief Minister of Jersey said:

“This is in response to a need for information without delay where terrorist activities are involved”.

Obviously we welcome the Prime Minister’s commitment to fighting terrorism, but are Jersey and all the other dependencies actually going to provide beneficial ownership information or not?

**The Prime Minister:** The short answer to that is, yes they are, and that is what is such a big breakthrough. Look, I totally accept that they are not going as far as us, because we are publishing a register of beneficial ownership. That will happen in June. We will be one of the only countries in the world to do so—I think Norway and Spain are the others. What the overseas territories and Crown dependencies are doing is making sure that we have full access to registers of beneficial ownership to make sure that people are not evading or avoiding their taxes.

In the interests of giving full answers to the right hon. Gentleman’s questions, let me give him the figures for full-time equivalents in HMRC in terms of compliance. The numbers went from 25,000 in 2010 to 26,798 in 2015. It is not how much money you spend on an organisation; it is how many people you can actually have out there collecting the taxes and making sure the forms are properly filled in.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The Prime Minister is quite right: the number of people out there collecting taxes is important, so why has he laid off so many staff at HMRC, who therefore cannot collect those taxes?

In 2013, the Prime Minister demanded that the overseas territories rip aside the “cloak of secrecy” by creating a public register of beneficial ownership information. Will he now make it clear that the beneficial ownership register will be an absolutely public document and transparent, for all to see who really owns these companies and whether they are paying their taxes?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me be absolutely clear: for the United Kingdom, we have taken the unprecedented step—never done by Labour, never done previously by Conservatives—of an open beneficial ownership register. The Crown dependencies and overseas territories have to give full access to the registers of beneficial ownership. We did not choose the option of forcing them to have a public register, because we believed that if that was the case, we would get into the situation the right hon. Gentleman spoke about, and some of them might have walked away from this co-operation altogether. That is the point. The question is, are we going to be able to access the information? Yes. Are we going to be able to pursue tax evaders? Yes. Did any of these things happen under a Labour Government? No.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The Prime Minister does talk very tough, and I grant him that. The only problem is that it is not a public register that he is offering us: he is offering us only a private register that some people can see.

It is quite interesting that the Premier of the Cayman Islands, Alden McLaughlin, is today apparently celebrating his victory over the Prime Minister, because he is saying that the information

“certainly will not be available publicly or available directly by any UK or non-Cayman Islands agency.”

The Prime Minister is supposed to be chasing down tax evasion and tax avoidance; he is supposed to be bringing it all into the open. If he cannot even persuade the Premiers of the Cayman Islands or Jersey to open up their books, where is the tough talk bringing the information we need to collect the taxes that should pay for the services that people need?

**The Prime Minister:** I think the right hon. Gentleman is misunderstanding what I have said. In terms of the UK, it is an absolute first to have a register of beneficial ownership that is public. He keeps saying it is not public; the British one will be public. Further to that—and I think this is important, because it goes to a question asked by the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy)—we are also saying to foreign companies that have dealings with Britain that they have to declare their properties, and the properties they own, which will remove a huge veil of secrecy from the ownership of, for instance, London property. Now, I am not saying we have completed all this work, but we have more tax information exchange, more registers of beneficial ownership, more chasing down tax evasion and avoidance, and more money recovered from businesses and individuals, and all of these things are things that have happened under this Government. The truth is he is running to catch up because Labour did nothing in 13 years.

Q6. [904330] **Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con):** My constituents John and Penny Clough, whose daughter Jane was tragically murdered by her ex-partner while he was out on bail, are campaigning to save Lancashire’s nine women’s refuges, which are currently under threat because Labour-run Lancashire County Council proposes to cut all their funding. Does the Prime Minister agree with the Clough family and me that Labour-run Lancashire County Council should prioritise the victims of domestic violence?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises a very moving case, and I know that the whole House will wish to join me in sending our sincere condolences to Mr and Mrs Clough. In terms of making sure that we stop violence against women and girls, no one should be living in fear of these crimes, which is why we committed £80 million of extra funding up to 2020 to tackle violence against women and girls. That includes funding for securing the future of refuges and other accommodation-based services, but it obviously helps if local councils make the right decisions as well.

**Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP):** The United Kingdom and its offshore territories and dependencies collectively sit at the top of the financial secrecy index of the Tax Justice Network. Since the leaking of the Panama papers, France has put Panama on a blacklist of unco-operative tax havens and the Mossack Fonseca offices have been raided by the police in Panama City. What have British authorities done specifically in relation to Mossack Fonseca and Panama since the leak of the Panama papers?

**The Prime Minister:** In terms of who is at the top of the pyramid of tax secrecy, I think it is now unfair to say that about our Crown dependencies and overseas territories, because they are going to co-operate with the three things that we have asked them to do in terms of the reporting standard, the exchange of tax information and access to registers of beneficial ownership. Frankly, that is more than we get out of some states in America, like Delaware. We in this House should be tough on all those that facilitate lack of transparency, but we should be accurate in the way we do it.

The right hon. Gentleman asked what we are doing about the Panama papers. We have a £10 million-funded, cross-agency review to get to the bottom of all the relevant information. That would hugely be helped if the newspapers and other investigative journalists now shared that information with tax inspectors so that we can get to the bottom of it.

On the right hon. Gentleman's final question, we are happy to support blacklists, but we do not think a blacklist should be drawn up solely on the basis of a territory raising a low tax rate. We do not think that is the right approach. It is the approach the French have sometimes taken in the past. In terms of taking action against tax havens, this Government have done more than any previous one.

**Angus Robertson:** Some 3,250 Department for Work and Pensions staff have been specifically investigating benefit fraud, while only 300 HMRC staff have been systematically investigating tax evasion. Surely we should care equally about people abusing the tax system and those abusing the benefits system. Why have this Government had 10 times more staff dealing often with the poorest in society abusing benefits than with the super-rich evading their taxes?

**The Prime Minister:** I will look carefully at the right hon. Gentleman's statistics, but they sound to me entirely bogus, for this reason: the predominant job of the DWP is to make sure that people receive their benefits, and the predominant job of HMRC is to make sure that people pay their taxes. All of the 26,000 people I spoke about earlier are making sure that people pay their taxes. The clue is in the title.

**Q8.** [904332] **Jesse Norman** (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): Will and Carol Davies and many other farmers in south Herefordshire are still awaiting their 2015 payments from the Rural Payments Agency, nearly four months after they were due. That follows the failure of the RPA website last year. It is causing great personal and financial distress, and threatens the future of farm businesses. Will the Prime Minister agree to meet farmers to discuss the issue and press the RPA to make these payments by the end of this month, and does he share my view that, at the very least, farmers should receive interest on the amounts overdue?

**The Prime Minister:** I recently met both the National Farmers Union and the Welsh NFU, and I continue to have meetings with farming organisations, including in my own constituency. I know there have been problems with the payment system. The latest figures show that some 87% of all claims have been paid. I believe that the figures for Herefordshire are in line with the national average, but obviously that is no consolation to the 13% that have not received those payments. That is why we have a financial hardship process. We are working with charities. We have made hardship payments amounting to more than £7 million, but we need to make sure that the lessons of how to make the system work better in future years are properly learned.

**Q2.** [904326] **Mr Douglas Carswell** (Clacton) (UKIP): If the British people vote to leave the European Union, will the Prime Minister remain in office to implement their decision?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes.

**Q10.** [904334] **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): Again on Europe, does the Prime Minister agree that the European Union is not just the world's biggest single market but an ample source of foreign direct investment, providing 50% of the investment that we receive; and an excellent platform for supply chains to thrive and prosper, which gives them the ability to get the skills and the innovation that they need? That, for my constituency, means that Sartorius, Renishaw, Delphi and a whole load of other hi-tech companies thrive and prosper, as they do elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

**The Prime Minister:** I well remember my visit to Renishaw's with my hon. Friend, where I was shown what I think was a world first: a bicycle that was printed on a 3D printer. I did not get on and give it a try, but it looked as though it would carry even someone of my weight. He is right, because the single market is 500 million people, and it is a great market for our businesses and our services. Increasingly, the market and the supply chain are getting more and more integrated. That is why we should think very carefully before separating ourselves from it.

**Q3.** [904327] **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Brain tumours are the biggest cancer killer of children and people under 40, but, despite that, research into them receives just over 1% of the UK's national spend on cancer research. That will be the subject of a debate next Monday in Westminster Hall.

Will the Prime Minister have a word with the Secretary of State for Health, so that the Minister who answers that debate might be able to bring with him or her some long-overdue good news of change in this area?

**The Prime Minister:** I am very happy to do exactly as the right hon. Gentleman says. It is an important issue. We invest something like £1.7 billion a year in health research, but there is always this question when it comes to cancer research. The spending has gone up by a third over the last Parliament to nearly £135 million, but there is always the question about whether that is fairly distributed between all the different types of cancer. I will make sure that the Minister can give him a very full reply.

Q11. [904335] **Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): I have a steel producer at the heart of my constituency, and so I share concerns raised about the future of our steel industry and, more widely, of energy-intensive manufacturing. The north of England still has significant manufacturing, but it is being held back by green taxes, high energy costs and emissions targets. What more can my right hon. Friend do to help energy-intensive industries?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. The changes that we are making are going to save the steel industry more than £400 million by the end of this Parliament, and that is a good example of the steps that we can take. There was an excellent debate yesterday in the House about this issue. We need to work on everything we can do in terms of procurement. We need to make sure that we are taking action in the EU against dumping, and we are. We need to make sure that we reduce energy costs where we can. We stand by to work with any potential purchaser of the Port Talbot works, which will safeguard steel jobs in other parts of the country, to see how we can help on a commercial basis. I am absolutely satisfied that we are doing everything we possibly can. We cannot totally buck the global trend of this massive overcapacity in steel and massive decline in prices, but those are the key areas—in terms of power, in terms of plant and in terms of procurement—where we can help.

Q4. [904328] **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): Research by the Sutton Trust shows that turning schools into academies does not necessarily improve them. Parents at thousands of excellent primary schools want them to continue to be maintained by their local authorities. Why are Ministers planning to overrule parents and force all those schools to become academies?

**The Prime Minister:** All the evidence shows that academies work as part of our education reforms. Let me give the House the evidence. If we look at schools that converted into academies, we see that 88% of them are either outstanding or good schools. If we look at the sponsored academies, which were often failing schools, we see that there has been, on average, a 10% improvement over the first two years. All the evidence is that the results are better, the freedoms lead to improvements and, where there are problems, intervention happens far faster with academies. We have got 1.4 million more children in good or outstanding schools, and I say, "Let's finish the job."

Q15. [904339] **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The Prime Minister has met many great people, but I believe he has yet to meet the Vale of Evesham's very own Gus the "asparagus man". Would he like to rectify that omission by joining me in the Vale of Evesham for the British asparagus festival, which starts on St George's day, and show his support for our fantastic farming industry?

**The Prime Minister:** I am happy to say that my hon. Friend's constituency is only one constituency away and we share the same railway line, so if there is an opportunity for some great British asparagus, I would be very happy to join him.

Q5. [904329] **Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): May I take the Prime Minister back to his response to the hon. Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson)? I, too, have met Mr and Mrs Clough, and it was a truly dreadful case. Women's refuges are facing absolute crisis. The changes that the Government propose to make to housing benefit will force the closure of women's refuges. The Prime Minister needs urgently to look again at these changes, because unless he makes refuges exempt, they will be closing up and down the country. Will he do it?

**The Prime Minister:** I would say to the hon. Lady that we are doing the same kind of thing with these refuges as we did in the last Parliament with rape crisis centres. That is why the £80 million of funding is so important, and that is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has written to local authorities to explain that this money is available to make sure those refuges are there.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): As part of world autism awareness week last week, the National Autistic Society launched its biggest ever awareness campaign, called "Too Much Information", and young Alex, the star of the film, was here in the House and met many MPs on Monday this week. The society's research shows that some 50% of autistic people and their families sometimes do not even go out in public because they are afraid of what people think and of the public reaction to them. Will the Prime Minister meet me and the charity to discuss how the Government can support this campaign, and how we can help tackle the social isolation of so many families through this campaign and through Government assistance?

**The Prime Minister:** First, let me pay tribute to my right hon. Friend, who has been campaigning and legislating on this issue for many years now, including the landmark legislation that went through in the last Parliament. We have been working closely with the Autism Alliance and have invested some £325,000 since 2014, but she is right that more needs to be done in terms of helping families with autistic children and raising the profile and increasing the understanding of what having an autistic child or being autistic is all about. I think she is absolutely right to do that. Let me put in a plug for "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time", which is still on at the theatre on Whitehall. I took my children the other day. It is absolutely excellent, and will provide a better explanation of autism than perhaps anything we can discuss in this House.

Q7. [904331] **Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The authorities in Peru, El Salvador and Panama have raided offices of Mossack Fonseca, seizing documents and computer equipment, but no one has knocked on the door of the law firm's branch in the UK. While recognising the operational independence of our enforcement agencies, does the Prime Minister share my deep concern that, as we speak, documents are no doubt being shredded and databases being wiped, undermining the opportunity to bring further potential wrongdoing to light?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady makes an important point, which is that we need to make sure that all the evidence coming out of Panama is properly investigated. That is why we have set up a special cross-agency team—including the National Crime Agency, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and other relevant bodies—to make sure we get to the bottom of what happened. But she is right to reference the fact that these organisations are operationally independent. It would be quite wrong for a Minister or a Prime Minister to order an investigator into a particular building in a particular way. That is not a Rubicon we want to cross in this House. Let us empower the National Crime Agency, empower HMRC, give them the resources and let them get on with the job.

**Andrew Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): May I draw the Prime Minister's attention to the tragic death of Ayeeshia Jane Smith in my constituency? Ayeeshia was 21 months old when she was stamped on by her mother so violently that it punctured her heart. The pathologist said her body resembled a "car crash victim". Yet Ayeeshia had been known to social services since the day she was born. They knew about the violent boyfriends; they knew about the domestic violence; they saw the doors kicked in; they smelt the cannabis; they saw the bruises; they saw the cuts; they saw the fingerprints on her little thighs—and they did nothing.

The Prime Minister will understand that people in Burton want to know how this could have happened. They are concerned to know that the serious case review has on its panel people who are directly involved in the organisations being investigated. Will the Prime Minister look at what we can do to make this and other serious case reviews more independent, so that we can make sure that no other child suffers the life and the death of Ayeeshia Jane Smith?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this. In the work that we all do, we get to hear about some hideous and horrific incidents, but for anyone watching television that night, and seeing the description of what happened to Ayeeshia, it simply took your breath away that people could behave in such a despicable and disgusting way towards their own children. In my view, no punishment in the world fits that sort of crime carried out by the child's own parent. As my hon. Friend said, there will be a serious case review. I will look carefully at his suggestions, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of Education will do so as well. There are criticisms of the way in which these cases are conducted, but in this case, to start with, we must get on with the serious case review because we have got to get to the bottom of what went wrong.

Q9. [904333] **Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): There are currently more than 7,000 people in the UK who need an organ transplant, including 139 children, and many will die because of the shortage of available organs. The Welsh Labour Government have already introduced groundbreaking legislation for opt-out organ donation in Wales. Will the Prime Minister join me in supporting the "change the law for life" campaign for opt-out organ donation throughout the UK?

**The Prime Minister:** I am always happy to look at this again. I have looked at it before and have not come out in favour of opting out. We debated the matter in the last Parliament and made quite a lot of moves towards making opt in much easier. We found that different hospitals and different areas of the country had very different records for how well they do. My personal position is that we should support and continue to drive opt in, but the House of Commons can vote on this issue from time to time, and on whether it wants to go down the Welsh track rather than the track we are on. Personally, I think let us make opt in work better.

**Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be well aware that our colleague Lord Bates has just started a 2,000 mile walk from Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro, arriving in time for the Olympics to raise awareness for the Olympic Truce and money for refugee children. Will my right hon. Friend join me in wishing Lord Bates well on this epic journey, and also commit the Government to upholding the values and principles of the Olympic Truce?

**The Prime Minister:** I have already written to Michael Bates to wish him well on this long walk and to support the work that he has done over many years for the Olympic Truce. He leaves me a bit of a hole in the House of Lords, where he has been doing fantastic work for the Home Office on security issues, so we wish him a good walk and a speedy return.

Q12. [904336] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): At Ealing hospital, the technically junior, though highly experienced doctors I met last week are dismayed that the Government's equality assessment of their new contract finds that it discriminates against women—more than half of them. As the Prime Minister is a self-confessed feminist, leading a progressive Government—[*Interruption.*] So he says. Will he reverse this blatant injustice, which has no place in 2016?

**The Prime Minister:** I am grateful for the question and backhanded compliment. The contract is actually very pro-women because it involves a 13% basic pay rise, restricts the currently horrendous and unsafe hours that some junior doctors work, and gives greater guarantees about levels of pay and the amount of money that doctors will get. I think that as people start to work on it and with it, they will see that it is very pro-women.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): Over 200,000 economic migrants came from the European Union in the period for which we have figures. Yet the propaganda sheet sent out to the British people claims that we maintain control of our borders. Have we withdrawn from the free movement of people, or is that sheet simply untrue?

**The Prime Minister:** The truth is this: economic migrants who come to the European Union do not have the right to come to the UK. They are not European nationals. They are nationals of Pakistan, or Morocco, or Turkey. None of those people has that right. That is very important—and frankly that is why it is important that we send information to households: so that they can see the truth about what is proposed. What my hon. Friend has just put forward is a classic scare story. Britain has borders. Britain will keep its borders. We have got the best of both worlds.

Q13. [904337] **Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): Stirling University in my constituency is Scotland's university for sporting excellence. Elite sports have been rocked over recent months by an international doping scandal, which threatens to see entire countries thrown out of and banned from major sporting competitions. Does the Prime Minister agree that, in this Olympic year, the World Anti-Doping Agency needs further support, and will he tell me what further action can be taken?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise this issue. The World Anti-Doping Agency has made a lot of advances in recent years. The issue is relevant to our anti-corruption summit on 12 May, when we will look at corruption in sport and bring forward new codes of practice that we will adopt in this country and hope others will also adopt. There is also the question of whether doping should be made a specific criminal offence; that is something that we should look at and debate in this House.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): What progress has been made in implementing Sir Bruce Keogh's 10 clinical standards, published in December 2013, which are absolutely essential for rolling out the seven-day NHS?

**The Prime Minister:** Perhaps I can write specifically to my hon. Friend on the clinical standards. What is good is that Bruce Keogh and others within the NHS support the vision of a seven-day NHS. We should of course pay tribute to all the doctors and nurses who work at weekends already—that is a very important point—but we are trying to move towards an NHS in which the individual has access to their family doctor seven days a week and hospitals work more on a seven-day basis, which will save lives and improve care. I will write to my hon. Friend about the specific detail.

Q14. [904338] **Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Parent governors play a key role in local schools, supporting their children's education and performing an important civic duty. Is the Prime Minister aware of the sadness and anger that have resulted from the forced academies announcement because the duty for each school to have parent governors will be removed, and will he urgently review this attack on parents?

**The Prime Minister:** I am absolutely delighted that the hon. Lady asked that question, as I know we will be debating the issue later today. Let me be clear: we support parent governors and think that they have a great role to play, but no school should think that simply by having parent governors it has solved the problem of how to engage with parents. Let me say to her that there is something in the Labour motion for today's debate that is actually inaccurate and should be withdrawn. It says that the White Paper

“proposes the removal of parent governors from school governing bodies”.

It does not do such a thing. As well as not getting his tax return in on time, the Leader of the Opposition is bringing forward motions to this House that are simply wrong.

## Points of Order

12.38 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On 2 December, during the debate on Syria, the Prime Minister promised that there would be regular quarterly progress reports to this House on the military action against Daesh. The longest a quarter could last is 92 days, but it is now 133 days since that pledge was made. Have you had any indication from the Government as to whether they intend to make that quarterly progress report so that we can see what action is being taken and whether it is effective?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order and his courtesy in giving me advance notice of it. The question of how a Government fulfil a commitment to the House is principally a matter for Ministers. Having taken a keen interest in this matter, the right hon. Gentleman will know that a report was presented to the House by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in December, and that a second report, which I think was billed or tagged as a quarterly report, was provided by the Secretary of State for International Development on 8 February. If memory serves me correctly, it was an oral statement, and it may be that the right hon. Gentleman and some other Members were hoping for—or even expecting—a written report. That is, however, not a matter for the Chair.

To be fair, the Government have made a large number of statements to the House over the past few years—that is a matter not of speculation but of fact. The only point I would make gently is that since the Foreign Secretary had unavoidably to be absent from Foreign Office questions yesterday—that prompted a modicum of comment from his own side although he had done me the courtesy of notifying me beforehand—it might be thought a good idea for a subsequent report to be provided by him to the House. If there is an appetite for that report to be oral, I know that it will be delivered by the Foreign Secretary with great dexterity. It would also have the additional “advantage”—I say that in inverted commas because it is a matter for the House to decide—of pleasing a right hon. Gentleman from the Liberal Democrat Benches.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You will be aware of the decision by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to close its Sheffield policy office. Despite repeated requests at the BIS Select Committee for the Department to share the figures on which that decision was based, the permanent secretary told the Committee:

“I don’t think I can point you to one specific document which covers specifically the Sheffield issue.”

In answer to a question about costs from my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) at the Public Accounts Committee, he said that the decision was

“not based on individual cost-benefit analysis of a static closure.”

I have had access to a document entitled “BIS 2020—Finance and Headcount outline”, which specifically covers the Sheffield issue and is, in the permanent secretary’s words,

“an individual cost-benefit analysis of a static closure.”

Will you clarify, Mr Speaker, whether the permanent secretary’s words constitute misleading the House, and advise me on how I can get the information in front of the two Committees of the House that have requested it?

**Mr Speaker:** I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but my instinctive reaction is that exegesis of what is said by the Government, including permanent secretaries, and adjudication upon it, is not a proper matter for the Chair. I think it is safer to keep out of that. It may well be that it is a subject of some dispute on which the hon. Gentleman is dissatisfied, but I underline that it is for the Committees concerned to press for the information that they require. If they are dissatisfied with what they have or have not received, they should persist, and there are well-established procedures for doing so. I have a feeling, however, that by putting his concerns on the record, the hon. Gentleman may find that the Government are able and inclined to offer the information he requires.

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise for not giving you advance notice of this point of order, but I had hoped that it would be raised during Prime Minister’s questions. On 28 October 2015 in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, Sir John Chilcot said that the text of the Iraq report would be available in the week commencing 18 April 2016, at which point it would be passed to the security services for checking. Given that that is next Monday, I wonder whether you have received notice from any Minister who intends to make a statement to the House, to update it as to when that process will be finished and the long-awaited report will be available?

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer is that I have received no such indication of an imminent statement on the matter. When this issue has been aired in the House, the sense of dissatisfaction across the Chamber has been audible not just to the Chair, but to millions of people throughout the country. It has become exceptionally and excessively protracted. I understand the hon. Gentleman’s frustration. He has put his point on the record again, and I hope that it will have been heard in the appropriate quarters. Have I received an indication of a statement? I am afraid I have not.

## **Improvement of Rail Passenger Services (Use of Disruption Payments)**

*Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)*

12.45 pm

**Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require Schedule 8 disruption payments between Network Rail and train operating companies to be allocated to specified projects aimed at increasing the quality, value for money or reliability of passengers' experience of railway travel and associated services; and for connected purposes.

I am grateful for the opportunity to present the Bill to the House today, the purposes of which are threefold. First, the Bill seeks to improve the services on offer to rail commuters across the country. Secondly, it aims to ensure that millions of pounds of taxpayers' money is directed towards benefiting passengers, rather than lining the pockets of train operating companies. Thirdly, the Bill seeks to shine a light on a part of the rail industry that is bewildering in its complexity, and to open it up to greater public scrutiny and accountability. The Bill would create a responsibility for the regulator to guarantee that any net income made by train operators from schedule 8 payments in totality is used to fund overall passenger benefits on the network. It is important to note that the Bill is not intended to stop or replace current compensation arrangements between train operators and passengers, which reimburse passengers for delays.

Rail commuters in Enfield and throughout the country are getting a raw deal. They are paying sky-high ticket prices for a rock-bottom service. They are currently having to endure the worst performance in terms of train punctuality for almost a decade. In 2014-15, 47 million passenger journeys on the railways were either cancelled or delayed. Members of the public are shocked when they learn that train operators can actually make a profit from Network Rail failures. If trains are delayed or cancelled and the responsibility lies with Network Rail—for instance, when points do not work or power fails—Network Rail makes compensation payments to the train operators. These are known as intra-industry arrangements or schedule 8 disruption payments. However, train operators are not obliged to reinvest any of that money in services for the benefit of passengers.

The payments received from Network Rail bear no relation whatever to the passenger compensation schemes between the train operators and their customers. Indeed, only a fraction of what train operators receive in payments from Network Rail is ever passed on to commuters whose journeys have been disrupted. Passengers are certainly not helped to claim what they are owed for delays, given that train operators make it so difficult for them to access compensation. It is really important that passengers are made more aware of their rights. I applaud the recent work of Which? and its "Make rail refunds easier" campaign, putting pressure on the rail regulator and train operators to make this whole process simpler, fairer and more accessible to commuters.

I call on the Government to bring rail travel within the EU-compliant Consumer Rights Act 2015. The unfairness of the current structure of railway compensation payments is really brought to light when we consider how much money is involved and how poorly passengers

are compensated compared with train operators. I commend the recent work of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) and the shadow Transport team to expose this issue. Their analysis has shown that between 2010 and 2015 Network Rail paid out £575 million to train operators in schedule 8 payments. Over the same period, train operators provided compensation to passengers to the tune of only £73 million. That is a compensation gap of more than half a billion pounds, a substantial boost to train operating companies' profit margins.

I accept that train operators should be able to cover the costs of any loss of revenue they incur that arise from the unplanned delays caused by Network Rail. What they should not be able to do, however, is make a profit over and above those costs from train delays and cancellations. That is just plain wrong.

In 2014-15, the Government provided a grant payment to Network Rail of £3.8 billion. Therefore, to add insult to injury, a significant amount of taxpayers' money flows from Network Rail back to private train operating companies, many of them ultimately owned by foreign Governments, under schedule 8 payments. It is scandalous that a system can be designed in such a way that the very people using the rail network and who are most affected by the poor standard of service on offer—tax-paying commuters—can end up contributing to train operators' profits out of their own misery! How can this be right? Where is the accountability to the fare-paying, tax-paying public for how this system operates and where this money goes?

The rail expert Christian Wolmar has said:

"In an ideal world, the train operators would only get back the actual money that unexpected delays costs them. However, instead the level is determined by an economic model that only very vaguely reflects the impact of delays felt by passengers. So vaguely, in fact, to be meaningless."

He went on to say that the current system

"does the railways no credit and creates the perverse incentives that plague the industry."

I could not agree more; the situation must change. We need a way of linking schedule 8 payments to benefits that improve the customer experience of the railways. This Bill would make that happen.

I want the rail regulator to be given the power to ensure that train operating companies have to provide full disclosure of any net profit they might make from schedule 8 payments. This information should be made available to the public. With rigorous monitoring by the regulator, this money should be put towards improving the customer experience and providing a high-value service. Such measures could include retaining ticket office staff; facilitating easier access to station platforms and trains; free wi-fi on trains; or using the money towards paying for a guarantee that trains will not miss out stops—a particular frustration for a number of my constituents. These are just a few suggestions, and I think that, should this Bill become law, it would be a very good idea to consult passengers on the improvements they want to see to their services.

It is clear from recent evidence that the rail regulator understands many of the issues I am looking to address with this Bill. At the end of last year, the regulator and Network Rail agreed a £4 million rail reparation fund to benefit directly commuters affected by poor performance on routes provided by Thameslink, Southern and the

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Gatwick Express services. By increasing the number of staff at stations, employing more track workers to deal with disruptions and introducing incident management software to resolve issues on routes more quickly, the regulator sought to “enhance” the services for passengers affected by poor performance.

I want a permanent rather than a temporary scheme in place that can benefit all passengers across the country. However, the rail reparation fund example is an important first step by the regulator. What it has set out to achieve reinforces the fundamental principle that lies at the heart of the Bill before us—that improving rail passengers’ services should be the top priority for Network Rail and train operators. Commuters should not be left waiting on station platforms while train operators pick up big profits from the rail industry’s complex, opaque and unfair compensation arrangements.

I would like to thank colleagues from across the House who have agreed to sponsor my motion today. That support shows the extent to which we all want to see the rail industry reformed for the benefit of passengers—our constituents. It is for all these reasons that I commend this Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Joan Ryan, Tom Brake, Julie Elliott, Mrs Louise Ellman, Frank Field, Kelvin Hopkins, Peter Kyle, Caroline Lucas, Siobhain McDonagh, Will Quince, Henry Smith and Mr Charles Walker present the Bill.

Joan Ryan accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 April 2016, and to be printed (Bill 160).*

## Opposition Day

[UN-ALLOTTED DAY]

### Tax Avoidance and Evasion

12.55 pm

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern the revelations contained within the Panama Papers and recognises the widespread public view that individuals and companies should pay their fair share of tax; and calls upon the Government to implement Labour’s Tax Transparency Enforcement Programme which includes: an immediate public inquiry into the revelations in the Panama Papers, HMRC being properly resourced to investigate tax avoidance and evasion, greater public sector transparency to ensure foreign companies wanting to tender for public sector contracts publicly list their beneficial owners, consultation on proposals for foreign companies wanting to own UK property to have their beneficial owners listed publicly, working with banks to provide further information over beneficial ownership for all companies and whom they work for, the swift implementation of full public country-by-country reporting with a fair turnover threshold as well as ensuring robust protection for whistle blowers in this area, ensuring stricter minimum standards of transparency of company and trust ownership for Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories, consideration of the development of the Ramsey Principle by courts, implementation of an immediate review into the registry of trusts, and the strengthening and extension of the General Anti-Avoidance Rule to cover offshore abuses.

I see that the Chancellor is absent again today. Much as I look forward to seeing the various members of his Treasury team, is there a specific reason why he is not here for this important debate? I am happy to give way. [Interruption.] Is it critical? In respect of his attendance at the International Monetary Fund, he might look at yesterday’s IMF report that downgraded the growth expectations for our economy and think again about the policies he is pursuing, which fail to invest in the infrastructure, skills and new technology that our economy needs to compete in the world market. Perhaps we will send him a letter and he can say hello to the Chamber some time when he happens to be passing through.

We need to move the debate about tax avoidance and evasion on to the issue of the fairness and effectiveness of our tax system, and we need to do so as constructively as we can. The leak of documents from Panama lawyers Mossack Fonseca has provoked an extraordinary public discussion, and an entire hidden world has been brought into the light. What it reveals is profoundly unsettling.

We now know that Mossack Fonseca sat at the centre of a vast web of tax evasion and tax avoidance. The world’s super-rich commissioned its services to hide their income and wealth from the public gaze. Some of them had plainly criminal intentions. Money from the Brink’s-Mat robbery was allegedly laundered through a shell company set up by Mossack Fonseca, while the Mexican drug baron Rafael Caro Quintero held his property through a shell company established by Mossack Fonseca.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Disturbing points have been raised about Putin and the Russian regime. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm whether the shadow Treasury spokesman, his hon. Friend the Member

for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), raised any of those points about the Russian Administration when on “Russia Today”?

**John McDonnell:** That certainly will happen in future.

Even if they were not criminals, many of Mossack Fonseca’s clients, if not all, had the strong intention of evading or avoiding the taxes that would otherwise have been due from them.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent speech and for bringing this debate to the House. Does he agree that this is a real issue for people in London, particularly in respect of the impact that these shady characters have on our London property market? It is a tragedy that Londoners, who want to remain in London, have to move out because these criminal elements are messing up the international finance system.

**John McDonnell:** That confirms the need for open and public disclosure of beneficiary ownership and beneficiary interests. As my hon. Friend and every London MP knows, speculation on property in this capital city denies many of our constituents a decent roof over their heads.

**Jo Cox** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**John McDonnell:** Let me press on a little, and I shall give way shortly.

Mossack Fonseca exploited the presence of loopholes and entire jurisdictions that favour secrecy and minimal taxation. We can expect further news over the next few weeks and months, as the investigative work continues. Yesterday the Panama headquarters of Mossack Fonseca was raided, but 10 days on since the initial leak, I believe that its UK offices in Hitchin—not far away—have not been, despite the raising of concerns by the firm’s founder about the lack of due diligence performed by the UK office in relation to a company in its charge, and a clear legal precedent for the UK authorities to intervene.

There may be more revelations to come, set to tarnish individual reputations. I put this mildly: the Prime Minister has done himself no favours over the last 10 days. A lesson for the future is that, when asked a straight question, one should answer straightforwardly and straight away. The Prime Minister could and should have come clean about his relationship with Blairmore Holdings far earlier.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give a straight answer to a straight question. Does he regret the support that he gave to the IRA? They are still laundering money and still avoiding taxes in Northern Ireland, and he supported their activities in the past.

**John McDonnell:** I have never given the IRA support in relation to money laundering or any other activity. Let me make it absolutely clear that wherever laundering takes place, it is illegal and should be tackled, and I shall welcome the hon. Gentleman’s future contribution to the establishment of procedures to ensure that that happens.

**Jo Cox:** Having spent 10 years as an aid worker, I am acutely aware of the millions of pounds that are lost to development in poor countries as a result of these tax havens. Does my hon. Friend agree that, before the anti-corruption summit that will take place in London in May, the Prime Minister needs to do far more to reassure the House that he will accelerate his efforts to persuade British overseas territories to mirror the United Kingdom’s welcome move, and establish a transparent public register of beneficial ownership?

**John McDonnell:** The issue of a public register is critical to any measures that are taken in the future, because such a register will enable these kleptocrats to be held to account—particularly in the developing world, where they have denied development resources to the economies of their countries.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Transparency throughout the Crown dependencies and the overseas territories is, of course, crucial. Does not the lack of such transparency further reinforce the message to our constituents that there is one tax rule for the rich and powerful, and another for everyone else?

**John McDonnell:** One of the key things that I think the whole House must do in the coming period is re-establish the credibility and fairness of our taxation system, which has been so badly damaged.

**Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): The shadow Chancellor has called for greater transparency on the part of the Crown dependencies. Can he explain why this is the first time he has made such a call? Why did he not make such calls during the 13 years of the last Labour Government?

**John McDonnell:** May I ask the hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: “Answer!”] I am. Calm down.

If the hon. Gentleman looks at my parliamentary record over the last 18 years, he will see that I was one of the first MPs to set up the tax justice meetings in the House that brought the Tax Justice Network here, and to do the necessary research. He will also see that, as shadow Chancellor, I have commissioned a review of HMRC’s activities in terms of the tax base, including those relating to avoidance and evasion. However, I understand his concern. I have worked on this issue on a cross-party basis for a number of years, and have criticised successive Governments for not doing enough.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): My hon. Friend has spoken of tax fairness. Does he agree that the Panama papers have revealed a channelling of moneys to the very rich while the poor have to pay their taxes, and that that comes on top of a Budget in which capital gains tax was cut for the top 3% through changes in personal independence payments for the disabled? Does that not show that we are not “all in it together”?

**John McDonnell:** I think that what people found extremely disappointing in the Budget debate was that, as my hon. Friend says, the cut in capital gains tax was being paid for by cuts in benefits for people with disabilities. That did indeed demonstrate very starkly that we were not all in it together. Perhaps these revelations will

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enable us to take steps towards the establishment of a fair taxation system that will fund our public services effectively.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I thank the shadow Chancellor for being so generous with his time.

Last night, an all-party parliamentary group to which I belong held an excellent meeting with a journalist from *The Guardian* and the campaigners who exposed the scandal. They informed us that openness and transparency in the overseas territories could be achieved quite simply through an Order in Council from the United Kingdom Government. The achievement of those aims is a matter of will on the UK Government's part.

**John McDonnell:** My hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House made that point last week, giving example after example of cases in which Orders in Council had been issued. They have been used very effectively by successive Governments, and it bewilders me that this Government are not taking that opportunity now.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**John McDonnell:** May I press on for a little while? I am only on the third page of my speech. This is getting ridiculous. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman later, but I have already given way a fair amount. As you know, Mr Speaker, I am generous, but I do not want to speak for too long.

Even today, we have not seen the Prime Minister's full tax return or that of the Chancellor, and it is important that that should happen. The Prime Minister established the principle, which I advocated three months ago, that the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor should publish their tax returns—not summaries; their full tax returns—but that has not happened.

However, what confronts us today is an issue far bigger than any individual. At the centre of the allegations is a single issue. The fundamental problem is not tax avoidance by this individual or that company; those are symptoms of the disease. The fundamental issue is the corruption of democracy itself. At the core of our parliamentary system is the idea that those who levy taxes on the people are accountable to the people. If those who make decisions about our taxation system are believed to be avoiding paying their own taxes, that undermines the whole credibility of our system.

**James Cartlidge:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**John McDonnell:** I had better give way to the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) first; otherwise, he will be disappointed.

**Robert Jenrick:** I am grateful to the shadow Chancellor. May I hark back to the point about Orders in Council? Was the shadow Chancellor surprised to learn that his friend and leader, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), once described the use of Orders in Council by the last Labour Government as “extremely

undemocratic” and, in fact, “medieval? Does he think that the Leader of the Opposition is a johnny-come-lately on this issue?”

**John McDonnell:** It depends on the issue that is being addressed. Sometimes harking back to the medieval period may be the most effective way of dealing with these problems.

**James Cartlidge** *rose*—

**John McDonnell:** I must press on. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman later, if that is okay.

The common understanding is also that those who live here and benefit from public services will make a proportionate contribution towards them. The level of taxation may vary—sometimes it is higher, sometimes lower—but because we have a shared sense of fairness, we expect those with the broadest shoulders to carry the greatest burden in taxes. Over the last 30 years, however, we have witnessed the growth of wealth inequality on such a scale that it has undermined that basic principle of democracy. Figures from Oxfam suggest that the richest 1% own more than the rest of the world combined.

**James Cartlidge** *rose*—

**John McDonnell:** Let me press on for a little while. I will return to the hon. Gentleman, I promise.

Great hoards of assets, in property and in financial wealth, have been built up. According to the best available measures, the levels of income inequality in Britain today are climbing as high as they were at the time of the first world war. The share of income going to the super-rich has risen almost inexorably for three decades. We are returning to the levels of inequality that were experienced before universal suffrage—before women had the vote, and before the development of universal free education and healthcare—in a world that existed before the gains of democracy brought obscene levels of wealth inequality under control, and created a more humane society for the majority.

**James Cartlidge** *rose*—

**John McDonnell:** Let me press on. I will come back to the hon. Gentleman.

The world of the Rockefellers and the robber barons is the one to which we are returning: a world in which there is immense, almost unimaginable wealth for a gilded elite, but insecurity for growing numbers. Much of that wealth is now held offshore in secretive, unaccountable tax havens. According to the most recent estimate, \$21 trillion dollars, equivalent to a third of global GDP, is hidden from taxation systems in global tax havens. It is estimated that, if taxed fairly, that wealth would raise \$188 billion a year in extra taxation.

This is not about a few families seeking to “minimise their tax bill”, as was claimed by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh). It is systematic. An offshore world is operating parallel to the world in which the rest of us live. This is not an accident. The offshore world is being constructed, piece by piece, by multinational corporations and the super-rich, aided by shady offshore operations such as Mossack Fonseca, and—we must be honest about this—supposedly reputable

accountancy firms here in London are also playing their part. According to the Public Accounts Committee, PwC has aided tax avoidance “on an industrial scale”. Deloitte has advised big businesses on avoiding tax in African countries. Ernst and Young act as tax advisers to Facebook, Apple and Google, and just last month KPMG had one of its tax-avoidance schemes declared illegal by the High Court. Together, the big four accountancy firms in this country earn at least £2 billion annually from their tax operations.

But it is not just them. Banks headquartered and operating in London have been particularly proficient in directing their funds through Mossack Fonseca shell companies. HSBC and its affiliates created more offshore companies through Mossack Fonseca—over 2,300 in total—than any other bank. Coutts, a subsidiary of RBS, created over 500 offshore companies through its subsidiary in Jersey. Supposedly reputable companies are aiding and abetting the systematic abuse of our tax system.

We should be clear: the City of London is being viewed by many as a tax haven in the middle of a dense network of havens created for the super-rich to avoid the taxes the rest of us must pay.

**James Cartlidge:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that in 2010 the richest 1% contributed 25% of all tax, and does he welcome the fact that the Chancellor revealed in the Budget that that has now increased to 28%?

**John McDonnell:** It is not just a matter of tax, is it? It is not just a matter of income tax, either. Of course I recognise those figures, but distributional analysis has been undertaken independently of the Government. Conservative party policy since 2010 has seen some of the biggest losses for the poorest, not the wealthiest. The Women’s Budget Group put together the tax gains, the tax paid, the services cut and the benefit cuts. The poorest 10% will lose 21% of their income annually as a result of this Government’s policy—five times more than the top 10%. The analysis of the Institute for Fiscal Studies clearly shows that this year’s Budget hits the poorest 80% harder than the richest. Eighty per cent. of those cuts fall on whom? It is on women.

**Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way—he is always generous with his time. As well as appreciating the fact that 1% of the highest-income earners pay 28%, would he consider that since 2010 this Government have taken millions out of tax altogether by increasing the tax allowance—it is now £11,500?

**John McDonnell:** Let me deal with the tax threshold issue. The IFS has said that the biggest gains from the shift in the lower tax thresholds come for the higher earners. They are the ones who get the most and they benefit from the tax threshold moves. It describes the shifting of the tax thresholds as “very much a giveaway to the better off”.

**Robert Jenrick:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**John McDonnell:** I gave way earlier to the hon. Gentleman. I will press on because I know that others want to speak and I am sure he will want to speak himself.

This is a world that the super-rich inhabit. They live by different rules and it is an alien world for the majority of the rest of us.

**Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con):** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that his party’s opposition to the removal of the family home from the income tax threshold affects those on the lowest incomes in London and the south-east because it will mean that only the wealthy can afford to stay in London when the family home is sold and they have to pay inheritance tax?

**John McDonnell:** The hon. Lady makes an important point. We have supported the increase in tax thresholds to try to take people out of tax altogether, but the benefits overall have actually accrued to the highest earners rather than the lowest and we need a more sophisticated system than that. With regard to inheritance tax, the cut that was made this time around by the Government benefited the top 5% of the population. There must be a better way of ensuring that people can pass on their wealth to their children, rather than just benefiting the super-rich. We have to look at that again. I am happy to do that and meet her to discuss it.

**Maria Caulfield:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for being extremely generous in giving way, but there are low-income families in London and the south-east whose home’s value has increased beyond recognition. They are now asset rich but income poor. How will the Labour party help them if it does not take them out of inheritance tax?

**John McDonnell:** The important thing now, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) has said, is that we build more homes to house those people. That will be an effective way of reducing prices, too. That will give access to home ownership to thousands more in the capital.

**Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab):** Can we put this discussion on thresholds to bed once and for all? The people who are paying 28% income tax will get a small rise. Every one of us standing here will get a 10% pay rise next year and we will get a much bigger tax threshold rise than the ordinary men and women of this country. That is what they cannot understand. We and the super-rich are getting richer. They keep getting poorer. That is what this debate is about—it is about fairness.

**John McDonnell:** We have to find a better way in our taxation system to benefit those at the lower end of the scale. At the moment, although we are happy with the rise in tax thresholds, there needs to be a way to compensate for that more equitably. Again, it is not us saying this; it is the IFS and many other independent assessors. They are saying that this is not the most effective way of redistributing wealth in this country.

May I go back to my speech? I do not want to try your patience, Mr Speaker.

It is an alien world for the majority of us. It is a world of offshore trusts and legal trickery that would put Byzantium to shame; a world in which it is perfectly normal to buy property in London through a company registered in the British Virgin Islands, managed by lawyers in Panama with offices in Bermuda; a world in

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which citizenship and attachment to a country are something to pick and to choose depending on price. The scandal of the “non-doms” continues, in which a few super-rich can pay a notional fee instead of the taxes that would otherwise be due from them as residents.

Tucked away in this year’s Budget was an extraordinary clause that wrote off selected non-doms’ entire capital gains tax bill on any gains made before April 2017—a giveaway to the wealthy. This is not the world that most of us live in. Most of us pay our taxes. Contrary to the shocking opinion of the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), that is not because we live in a country of “low achievers”, as he described them. We do so because we understand that a decent society depends on the contributions all of us make. Without the payment of taxes, we cannot run the public services that are essential to a decent society.

**Christopher Pincher:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**John McDonnell:** Let me press on. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once.

We do not have access to the specialist services that Mossack Fonseca and other companies provide. We cannot negotiate with HMRC when and how much to pay in tax. However, for the global elite, tax avoidance is as much a part of their world as the yachts and the mansions. This world is a corrosive influence on our democracy. The more the super-rich can escape the burden of taxation, the more it falls on the rest of us in society.

It is morally wrong that a billionaire oligarch should be paying proportionately less in taxes than the migrant cleaner of his mansion. It is a disgrace that an immense global corporation such as Google should pay no corporation tax for nearly a decade, while small businesses are chased for tiny amounts. It is an affront to the basic principles of our democracy that large corporations should be able to negotiate sweetheart deals with HMRC. [Interruption.] It is also a corrosion of democracy when a revolving door apparently exists between HMRC, charged with collecting taxes—[Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It is very unseemly when the shadow Chancellor is addressing the House for there to be a side exchange between a member of the Opposition Front-Bench team and the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge). He must not get into this bad habit. His father-in-law is a distinguished Member. He will tell him how to behave properly, and I will do so as well.

**John McDonnell:** It is always best to keep the in-laws on-side, Mr Speaker.

It is a disgrace that an immense global corporation such as Google should pay no corporation tax for a decade, while small businesses are chased for tiny amounts. It is an affront to the basic principles of our democracy that large corporations should be able to negotiate sweetheart deals with HMRC. It is also a corrosion of democracy when a revolving door apparently exists between HMRC, which is charged with collecting taxes, and major accountancy firms whose business depends

on minimising taxes. HMRC’s last director went to work for Deloitte, and now we find that the executive director appointed by HMRC to oversee its inquiry into the Panama leaks is a former adviser to tax havens who believes that tax is a form of “legalised extortion”. The structures of Government are being bent out of shape by tax avoidance. Decisions are warped around the need to protect the interests and wealth of the super-rich and of giant corporations. Democracy becomes corroded.

On party donations, the Conservatives receive more than half their election campaign funding from hedge funds. In public view, here in London, its party leadership has made loud and repeated noises about tax avoidance, yet its MEPs in Brussels have voted six times, on instructions from the Treasury, to block the EU-wide measures against tax avoidance. As we have heard in evidence this week, the Prime Minister lobbied the EU Commission in 2013 to remove offshore trusts from new tighter EU regulations on avoidance. The Conservatives’ own record reveals that people no longer trust them on this issue. Not only have they impeded efforts to clamp down on tax avoidance, but these schemes directly implicate senior figures in the Conservative party. Several Conservative party donors, three former Conservative MPs and six Members of the House of Lords are among those with connections to companies on the books of the offshore law firm Mossack Fonseca.

As the super-rich flee their obligations to society, the burden of taxation is pushed elsewhere. As I have said, independent assessments of the tax and benefit changes introduced since May 2015 show that the poorest 10% are forecast to see their incomes fall by more than 20% by 2020, with 80% of the burden falling on women. It is the poorest and those least able to carry the burden who will suffer the most under this Government. An economic system that allows tax avoidance on this scale is one in which the inventor and the entrepreneur come second to the owner of wealth, the worker comes second to the plutocrat and the taxpayer come second to the tax dodger. It is a system in which inherited wealth and privilege, rather than talent and effort, are rewarded.

There has been criticism of the last Labour Government, and I was not enamoured of all their economic policies, but they did take measures against avoidance. Their measures on corporation tax avoidance are forecast—not by me, but by the *Financial Times*—to raise 10 times as much revenue as the present Chancellor’s schemes.

The Panama leaks must act as a spur to decisive action. In response to the leaks, the Government have stepped up their rhetoric on tax evasion but much of what has been announced falls short of what is needed or repeats existing announcements. I remind Ministers that page 223 of the Office for Budget Responsibility report that accompanied this year’s Budget outlined a disclosure scheme for companies operating in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. The report said that owing to HMRC’s consistent underfunding, it did not have the resources to follow up on the links of the scheme. I again offer some words of advice to those on the Government Front Bench: fewer press releases and more action. It is time to move on and to close down tax havens and clean up this muck of avoidance.

Let us take this step by step. We need an immediate and full public inquiry into the Panama leaks. The Government’s proposed taskforce will report to members

of the Government, the Chancellor and the Home Secretary, who are members of a party funded by donors featured in the Panama papers. To have any credibility, the inquiry must be fully independent. We must shine a light on, and start to prise apart, the corrupt networks that operate through tax havens. Part of that will involve creating a proper register of MPs' interests. Members of this House should not be able to hide behind spurious claims of privacy. We want HMRC to be properly resourced to chase down the tax avoiders, with a new specialist unit dedicated to the task. Foreign firms bidding for Government contracts here should be required to name their owners. Full, public, country-by-country reporting of earnings and ownership by companies and trusts is a necessity if fair amounts of taxation are to be charged.

The measures announced by the EU this week do not go nearly far enough, requiring only partial reporting by companies. The turnover threshold is far too high, and Labour MEPs in Europe will be pushing to get that figure reduced much more to make it more difficult for large corporations to dodge paying their fair share of tax. Banks need to reveal the beneficial ownership of companies and trusts they work with. That means creating a public register of ownership of companies and trusts, and not only of companies, as the Government are currently enforcing. The Prime Minister has a role to play in this, as it was he who lobbied for the exclusion of trusts from the proposed EU measures. Labour will work alongside leading tax experts to lead a review into publishing a public register of the trusts too often used to avoid paying tax and reduce transparency in our tax system.

We must ensure that Crown dependencies and overseas territories enforce far stricter minimum standards of transparency for company and trust ownership. The Government's current programme for reform is being laughed at by the tax havens. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said today, it was only this week, after signing a new deal on beneficial ownership, that the Cayman Islands Premier Alden McLaughlin celebrated a victory over the UK, saying:

"This is what we wanted, this is what we have been pushing for three years".

The truth is that the Government are playing into the hands of those who want to abuse the tax system.

**Christopher Pincher:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**John McDonnell:** Let me press on if I can.

We need serious action on enforcement. We need not central registers but, as Christian Aid and others are calling for, full public registers accessible to all, including journalists and other businesses, if we are going to curb the activities exposed in the Panama papers. This package of measures is Labour's tax transparency and enforcement programme. We believe that it offers a sound basis to take the first necessary steps against avoidance and towards openness and transparency. We are presenting it today as we want to see immediate effective action.

This is a test of leadership. The leadership of the Conservative party could take this opportunity to correct the series of errors that it has made. It could join us today in taking effective steps towards dealing seriously with avoidance. People want to see the Conservatives

take these steps. Otherwise, they will rightly stand accused of siding with the wrong people and of being the party of the tax avoiders. Incidentally, it was not long ago that the Chancellor of the Exchequer appeared on television to give advice on the "pretty clever financial products", as he described them, that would allow the wealthy to dodge inheritance tax.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Dodge? Can you use that word?

**John McDonnell:** Don't tempt me, Mr Speaker.

Some of the Conservative party's Back Benchers believe that tax avoidance is a sign of success. The party's donors are named in the Panama papers, and the Prime Minister himself is a direct beneficiary of a scheme set up in an offshore tax haven through his prior ownership of Blairmore Holdings shares.

The Panama leaks have presented a stark political choice. Do we continue to allow a system of corruption and avoidance, or do we now take the action necessary to restore fairness to our taxation system and to correct the abuse of democracy? That is the challenge, and the choice, ahead of us. I urge the Government and all Members of this House to join us in a serious programme of work to tackle the abuse of our tax system. The Government can make a start by supporting our motion today and adopting Labour's tax transparency enforcement programme. I commend this motion to the House.

1.27 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):** It is a great pleasure, for the second time this week, for the Government to be able to inform the House of how much more we have done than the previous Government to tackle evasion, avoidance and aggressive tax planning and to become a world leader in tax transparency. In 2010, we inherited a situation in which no one could find out who really owned a company in the UK or find out the details of a London property if it was owned by a foreign company. Not only were the international rules governing multinational companies out of date, allowing the tax base to be eroded and profits to be shifted, but there was no attempt to bring those rules up to date. Nor was there any sign that those matters were going to change. Loopholes, secrecy and concealment are the issues that we are sorting out, not only through what we are doing in the UK but through our firm and decisive action overseas.

**John McDonnell:** I want to clarify something that the Minister just said. Can he confirm that, under his proposals, members of the public will not have access to the register of beneficial owners of companies and trusts in overseas territories or elsewhere?

**Mr Gauke:** Let me tell the hon. Gentleman precisely what I just said. In 2010, no one could find out who really owned a company in the United Kingdom. From June, we will be publishing a public register of beneficial ownership. What is more, HMRC could not find out who owned a company based in an overseas territory. As a consequence of the agreements we have reached this week, HMRC will be able to do exactly that. That is

[Mr Gauke]

evidence of the progress that has been made under this Government, and that was not the case under the previous Government.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) pointed out, we have had lots of honeyed words from the Government about how they are going to deal with this matter. However, is that not belied by the fact that they appointed someone as the executive chair of HMRC who thinks that taxation is “legalised extortion”? Does that not demonstrate the attitude that exists in this Administration?

**Mr Gauke:** It is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman seeks to smear a public servant who has served Governments of—[*Interruption.*] Let me make this point. This is someone who has served Governments of both colours and with whom I have worked extensively over six years. He has been and is determined to do everything he can to ensure that our tax laws are properly enforced and deal with avoidance and evasion. I suggest to anyone who throws around one line from an article written in 1999 that they look at the entire thing, because his argument is about properly addressing tax avoidance by ensuring that we get the law right. It is unfortunate when accusations are thrown around about dedicated, impartial public servants.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend’s work over several years in dealing with some of these issues. Will he comment on the fact that this country now has the smallest gap on record between tax owed and tax paid? That is the real story about this Government’s efficiency in dealing with tax collection and the difficulties in the system.

**Mr Gauke:** My hon. Friend is right. The reality is that the tax gap, as a percentage of tax revenues, has fallen considerably over the past six years, which is testimony to the effort put in by not only this Government but HMRC. Bringing the tax gap down involves considerable challenges, such as tax evasion, tax avoidance, and inadvertent error on the part of taxpayers, which does happen from time to time as I am sure all hon. Members will recognise. We are determined to do what we can do improve and strengthen our systems. I am grateful for the opportunity today to make progress on that.

**Robert Jenrick:** Will the Minister emphasise the point about the tax gap? One of the most relevant measures is the tax gap specifically for those paying corporation tax. It was rising when the coalition Government came to power in 2010 and has fallen by almost 50% over the past six years, which is a major achievement.

**Mr Gauke:** My hon. Friend is right that the tax gap in the context of large companies and tax avoidance as a whole have fallen strongly. There is of course always more that we can do, so let me take this opportunity to set out some of those steps.

**Clive Efford:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Gauke:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I stand by the point that he has sought, not for the first time, to attack an impartial, dedicated public servant, who cannot answer back, by selectively quoting an article written in 1999. I have set out to the House the context in which that article was written. It is clear that this is someone who believes that the law should be properly enforced and who has a record over many years of doing precisely that.

**Clive Efford:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but he accused me of smearing this individual when I was actually quoting him word for word. He went on to say that tax is legitimised “only to the extent of the law.”

If the bar is set too low, fewer people will pay tax and more will be able to avoid it. My point—I stick by it—is that this Government’s attitude towards tax avoidance is lax and their words are more honeyed than their actions.

**Mr Gauke:** This is a Government that closes loopholes year in, year out, whose actions led to the OECD work on base erosion and profit shifting, that have given more powers to HMRC, that have seen a significant fall in the tax gap, particularly in the context of avoidance, and that have a proud record on dealing with tax avoidance, tax evasion and with all abuses in the tax system.

**Huw Merriman:** This Government, via HMRC, have raised £2 billion since 2010 from offshore tax evasion. Does that not demonstrate that this Government ensure that the tax that should be paid is paid?

**Mr Gauke:** That is absolutely right. I should make some progress with my speech, because it sets out what we have done and what we continue to do.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Gauke:** I say that I should make some progress, but I look around the House and everybody is standing up. I will give way to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan).

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): I thank the Financial Secretary for giving way. He referred to the Government’s record, but that record also includes changes to the controlled foreign companies rules, which in effect cost Exchequers here and, more importantly, in developing countries.

**Mr Gauke:** I do not accept that. The hon. Gentleman and I have debated the issue on several occasions. When we came to office in 2010, the controlled foreign companies regime was outdated and was driving businesses out of this country. Since our reforms, more businesses have located in the United Kingdom and more businesses have located their European headquarters here. The change has added to the UK’s attractiveness as a place to do business. As for developing countries, I have said to the hon. Gentleman before that the UK has been at the forefront of building the capacity of tax authorities in developing countries to ensure that they are able to collect the tax that is due under their laws.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Gauke:** I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), but I must then make some progress.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I thank the Minister for giving way. I of course welcome all that the Government have done on tackling tax avoidance and evasion. He says that more could be done on tax avoidance, but does he accept that, following the comments of the former Labour Foreign Secretary and Lord Chancellor, who said that the Labour Government could have taken but did not take action on tax avoidance and the previous Labour Government's deficit, the Government are playing catch up?

**Mr Gauke:** My hon. Friend is right to draw those remarks to the attention of the House. We have done a great deal on tax avoidance, but more can always be done and I will set out how we are doing that, working through the OECD.

**Mr Anderson:** Will the Minister give way? I want to help.

**Mr Gauke:** The hon. Gentleman says that he wants to help me, so I will give way and then really make some progress.

**Mr Anderson:** In the interests of the people listening to this debate, will the Minister provide, either today or by putting something in the Library, details of companies or schemes identified since 2012 that could be classed as either morally repugnant or morally wrong, terms that were used by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor in 2012 to describe such schemes? Has any work been done on that? Can we get a register so that we know who to look out for in future?

**Mr Gauke:** I think the hon. Gentleman is actually being helpful—not that I ever doubted that he would be. When there is artificial, contrived behaviour and when schemes are clearly contrary to the intentions of Parliament, we need to take strong action. We are also entitled to be critical of those involved in promoting such schemes. Indeed, we brought in a regime whereby we can name and shame the promoters of tax avoidance schemes that are clearly contrary to our intentions.

**Maria Caulfield:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Gauke:** As it is on that point, I will give way, but I am conscious that we are 10 minutes in and I am only on page 3 of my speech.

**Maria Caulfield:** I thank the Minister for giving way. If Opposition Members want to be helpful, they could speak to the unions. Unison paid no corporation tax in 2011 or 2012, despite owning £51.6 million of stocks and shares and generating an income of over £5 million.

**Mr Gauke:** It would be fair to say that I try to make it a rule not to comment on the individual tax affairs of taxpayers, but perhaps those who are happy to wade in on such debates should answer such questions.

HMRC is committed to exposing and acting on financial wrongdoing. Its specialist offshore unit is currently investigating more than 1,100 cases of offshore evasion around the world, with more than 90 individuals subject to current criminal investigation. The motion calls for greater HMRC resourcing. This shows precisely why at the summer Budget of 2015 we confirmed an extra £800 million to fund additional work to tackle evasion and non-compliance by 2020-21.

We have already heard quite a lot today about HMRC resources and headcount. I have to concede that there was a period when the numbers working in compliance and enforcement fell—that period was up to 2010. If we look at where the numbers were in 2010 compared with where they are today, we see that the enforcement and compliance numbers are higher than they were when the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and I took our respective positions—there has been an increase. I accept that much more of HMRC's work on processing self-assessment forms, for example, has been automated and the number of staff working in that area has fallen. However, the number of people working in compliance and enforcement has increased over the past six years.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Gauke:** I want to make a few more points. Even before last week, HMRC had already received a great deal of information on offshore companies, including those in Panama and including Mossack Fonseca. This information comes from a wide range of sources and is currently the subject of intensive investigation. HMRC has asked the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, the BBC and *The Guardian* to share the data they have received from last week's leaks. Clearly, it is important to examine the data very closely, which is why we are providing new funding of up to £10 million for an operationally independent cross-agency taskforce to analyse the Panama papers and take action on any wrongdoing and regulatory breaches. The taskforce will include analysts, compliance specialists and investigators from across HMRC, the National Crime Agency, the Serious Fraud Office and the Financial Conduct Authority. Between them, those agencies will have some of the most sophisticated technology, experts and resources to tackle money laundering and tax evasion anywhere in the world. The taskforce will report to my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Home Secretary on the strategy for taking action, and we will update Parliament later this year. I stress that the taskforce will have total operational independence. If it finds people to prosecute, it will prosecute them. If it finds information about illegality, it can act on it. In addition, the independent FCA has written to financial firms asking them to declare their links to Mossack Fonseca. If the FCA were to find any evidence that firms have been breaking the rules, it, too, has strong powers to take punitive action.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): The Minister mentioned last year's Budget and the £800 million for non-compliance issues. However, I understand from his answer to a written question that only £266 million of that has been allocated specifically to address tax fraud. How much of that will be spent on dealing with tax evasion?

**Mr Gauke:** The vast majority of the additional money we have put into compliance, both the £800 million announced last year and the £1 billion announced in the last Parliament, is going to dealing with tax evasion. All of it is going into compliance, which is in the areas of dealing with tax evasion and tax avoidance, at its broadest points. I am happy to let the hon. Lady have details of the precise numbers and to write to her on that subject, but this money is going into compliance exactly to deal with these areas. We have taken this very seriously, substantial sums will be raised for us over the course of this Parliament and we are proud of our record on this.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): First, on headcount, will the Financial Secretary confirm that there are 14,000 fewer staff in HMRC now than there were in 2010? Secondly, will he inform the House whether any HMRC staff currently have a compulsory redundancy notice?

**Mr Gauke:** I make no secret of the fact that HMRC is a smaller organisation than it was in 2010 in its headcount. That is because efficiency savings are capable of being found in an organisation that devotes a number of staff to processing pieces of paper when we are moving to a more digital world and we can make greater use of technology. On the area that is relevant to today's discussion and is the concern of the House, the concern is to ensure that HMRC has the resources to deal with tax evasion and tax avoidance. In that area, headcount is not the be-all and end-all; it is about what we get out, not what we put in. As it happens, however, the numbers of people dealing with enforcement and compliance have gone up under this Government. That point sometimes seems to be missed from this debate.

In a globalised world, international action is clearly vital to stop cross-border tax avoidance, evasion and aggressive planning. The UK Government can be proud of having done more than any other country to stamp out these practices. On avoidance, we have already implemented the OECD recommendations for country-by-country reporting to improve transparency between business and tax authorities, and have advocated public country-by-country reporting on a multilateral basis. The Commission's proposals for public country-by-country reporting are a step in the right direction towards new international rules for greater public transparency. However, we need to consider carefully the details of the Commission's proposal, including how the reporting is done and how the information is broken down.

On transparency in the context of tax evasion, which is a key point, the UK will be the first major country to publish a register of company beneficial ownership, free for anyone to access, allowing everyone to see who owns what company. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it a personal priority to use our G8 presidency to set a new global standard of tax transparency. As a result of our G8 presidency, 129 jurisdictions have committed to implementing the international standard for exchange of tax information on request, and more than 95 jurisdictions have committed to implementing the new global common reporting standard on tax transparency. This is a huge breakthrough. I recall that six years ago no one believed that we would get to that position, and I am delighted that we have done so. This is a step change in transparency.

**Robert Jenrick:** To emphasise that point, none of our major international economic competitors has agreed so far to have a public register of beneficial ownership. In fact, the state of Delaware, in which 90% of United States public companies are listed, has said that it has no intention of implementing this. We really are leading the world and leading our major competitors.

**Mr Gauke:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that point, and I will address the subject of the public register in a moment. It is considerable progress to have got central registers at all. We have pressed for that, and I am pleased that overseas territories and Crown dependencies have agreed to sign up to it.

**Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The Prime Minister has stated that the registers that the overseas territories will provide will be available to tax authorities here. However, as this debate has clearly highlighted, this is a global problem, so will those registers be shared with other tax enforcement agencies globally so that they can ensure that tax is not being avoided from other countries?

**Mr Gauke:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and I think there is scope for going further on it. What we have agreed is to ensure that we have access to those central registers. That is clearly very helpful but I think more progress can be made in that area and it is something to return to in the future.

Panama is one of the very few financial centres that has not yet fully committed to these international standards. We are clear that it should do so, and we continue to press for Panama to join the club of responsible nations. Of course, there is more international work to be done, particularly on tackling money laundering. That is why we are hosting an anti-corruption summit in May, with the aim of encouraging consensus not just on exchanging information, but on publishing such information and putting it into the public domain, as we are doing in the UK. Once again, Britain is leading the world on transparency, accountability and responsibility.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP)  
*rose—*

**Mr Gauke:** There are a few more points that I want to make, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

Let me address the subject of the UK's Crown dependencies and overseas territories. Reform of the regimes of the overseas territories and Crown dependencies has been a key objective for the UK, and the reforms that we have secured have been considerable. All the UK Crown dependencies and overseas territories with financial centres are signed up as early adopters of the common reporting standard, reporting annually from 2017 in respect of data that have already been collected. The Crown dependencies and overseas territories will share information with the UK from this year, one year earlier than the rest of the world. All the UK Crown dependencies and overseas territories with a financial centre have committed to transparency on company ownership.

Last Monday the Prime Minister announced that our overseas territories and Crown dependencies have agreed that they will provide UK law enforcement and tax

agencies with full access to information on the beneficial ownership of companies. For the first time, UK police and law enforcement agencies will be able to see exactly who owns and controls every company incorporated in those territories. This is a major step forward in transparency, the result of the Government's sustained work in this area.

It is right that we expect the overseas territories and Crown dependencies to meet international standards, and indeed they do. Yes, we want them to move towards a public central register. That is not yet the international standard. If, as the Leader of the Opposition suggests, every former colony that does not have a public register should be recolonised, where would we begin? Is he proposing that we invade Delaware? *[Interruption.]* Now we come to mention it, says the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris).

The reality is—and this is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) was right to raise—that the UK is in favour of a public register. We are implementing a public register in June for the first time. We have never had one before. We want other countries to do it, but very few of our European Union colleagues do so. It is not the case that the US does it. We want to ensure that it becomes the new international standard, but Orders in Council condemning overseas territories for failing to do what most of our EU colleagues do not do would not be fair or effective. The approach that we have taken has brought the overseas territories and Crown dependencies a long way. I fear that the approach advocated by the Labour party would fail to work.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Will the Financial Secretary give way?

**Mr Gauke:** I will make some more progress. The hon. Gentleman has just arrived.

As well as leading international action, we have ensured that domestically our regime is both tough and transparent. We have invested more than £1.8 billion in HMRC since 2010 to tackle evasion, avoidance and non-compliance. The £800 million extra funding that we announced in the summer Budget 2015 will enable HMRC to recover a cumulative £7.2 billion in tax over the next five years, and to triple the number of criminal investigations it can undertake into serious and complex tax crime. In the last Parliament, we made more than 40 changes to tax law, closing down existing loopholes and introducing major reforms to the UK taxation system, raising £12 billion.

Penalties increased, new offences created, loopholes closed, new measures introduced, more money raised—it does not stop there. In this Parliament, we have already announced a further 25 measures for legislation to tackle avoidance, evasion and aggressive tax planning. These measures are forecast to raise £16 billion by 2020-21. This week, we announced that we will bring before the House this year legislation to make it a crime for corporations to fail to prevent their representatives from criminally facilitating tax evasion. This new corporate offence goes further than any other country has gone in holding corporations to account for criminal wrongdoing. It will apply to both UK and overseas corporations, and will set a new standard for corporate responsibility and accountability. I am sure that Members on all sides of the House will support any measures as they go through.

What a contrast to the 13 years of the Labour Government. This week, the Opposition ramp up the rhetoric, but it was not on our watch that private equity managers had a lower rate of tax than their cleaners. It was not on our watch that the wealthy could sidestep stamp duty. It was not on our watch that high earners could disguise their remuneration as loans that were never repaid. Those are just some of the loopholes left open by Labour—loopholes that we have been busy closing ever since.

Let me make one further point about the approach of the Labour party over the past week. Yes, taxes should be paid in accordance with the law and the intentions of Parliament, and we should take action against those who fail to do so. Those of us on the Government Benches certainly hold that view. But too often in the past week, Labour has appeared to be motivated by something else. That something else is hostility to the wealthy—not for dodging taxes, but just for being wealthy, for being successful, for earning money and for wanting to pass it on to their children. Those are things which millions of people aspire to do.

Thanks to the actions that this Conservative Government have taken domestically and overseas, we are revolutionising tax transparency and putting an end to offshore tax evasion. This is strong and firm action from a Government committed to ensuring that every penny of tax that is owed is paid. I urge the House to reject the motion.

1.55 pm

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): May I make a number of small observations on what we have heard so far and gently say to the Minister, whom I like, that success is not measured merely in monetary terms? There are many, many successful people who will forgo stashing cash in the attic, the bank or the offshore tax haven.

On HMRC, we have no problem with efficiency or with organisations being fit for purpose. We have no qualms about genuine waste being eroded, but we look askance at 17 out of 18 tax offices being closed and only one being reopened, and the argument that somehow that will deliver more for substantially less.

The shadow Chancellor spoke about wealth inequality now rising to a level that we have not seen since the days of the Rockefellers or, as he said, the robber barons. I would not put the Prime Minister in the category of the super-rich, such as the Rockefellers. We know, however—the Prime Minister has been very open about this—that he bought shares, as he described it, in a trust or a fund as part of Blairmore Holdings. He sold them some years later. He did nothing illegal at all. That episode shone a very bright light in a very murky corner of offshore tax havens. One thing that struck me was that he bought the stock in 1997 and sold it in 2010. Those dates were familiar to me. It was the entire duration of Blair, Brown and new Labour. On the underlying issue, which I know the shadow Chancellor is genuinely concerned about, and on many of the points that the Minister made at the end of his speech, the Labour party did nothing for 13 years. I am glad that this is now on the agenda in a proper and cogent way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) made a number of telling points on this subject in his speech on the Second Reading of the Finance Bill on Monday. He said: “you cannot build economic success on the back of social injustice.”—*[Official Report, 11 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 115.]*

[Stewart Hosie]

He also said, quoting Adam Smith:

“No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.”

He argued that creating such division does not bring progress, and he went on to describe how much of this division is characterised today by people in certain quarters being able to park large sums of money offshore, and the rest—the vast majority—being unable to do that.

My hon. Friend suggested that, according to Jason Hickel of the London School of Economics, tax havens hide one sixth of the world’s total private wealth—in excess of \$20 trillion. Some estimates put that as high as \$32 trillion, and CNN described it on Monday evening as about 6% of total global GDP. There are higher estimates. We can probably all agree that it is around \$20 trillion, or 15 times UK GDP, parked offshore in tax havens—money and assets which very wealthy people and criminals can hide from the relevant tax authorities.

The revelations in the millions of documents in the Panama papers from Mossack Fonseca are but the tip of the iceberg. I am told that it is the fourth biggest law firm in Panama providing these services, which means there are three larger firms, and I presume that there are dozens, scores or hundreds of smaller firms doing the same. And it is not simply in Panama. Indeed, Panama does not even make it into the top 10 tax havens. Taken together—I do not think this situation has changed yet, notwithstanding the measures that the Government have announced—the UK and the overseas territories collectively are No. 1, outstripping even Switzerland by some margin, it is argued.

It is worth reminding ourselves that at a single address in the Cayman Islands, Ugland House, there are 19,000 registered businesses. I am certain that some of them will be legal, but many will not be. Many will be companies whose beneficial owners remain hidden from the tax authorities there, here or elsewhere. That means that income that should be the subject of taxation will go untaxed, to the detriment of public services here and elsewhere.

We have, in essence, an international system of finance that enables tax avoidance on an industrial scale, a system that hides from scrutiny the owners of vast wealth while the ordinary man, woman or business in the street does not have, and does not want, that luxury. They pay their fair share, and they simply want others to do the same. What makes it most unfair—I think this is why people are so angry—is that when assets or income are hidden and go untaxed, we all suffer as the resources we need for vital public services are reduced and squeezed.

It is also the case that much of the tax stashed in tax havens is looted from developing countries, so this is not simply an issue for the west. It is a matter of fundamental importance to those developing economies, which frankly are in even more need of the tax receipts that are effectively stolen from and then parked in tax havens around the world. That is why part of the solution must involve a global agreement on country-by-country reporting to ensure that tax authorities and others can follow the money.

The question from my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) was absolutely right. We are moving to having data shared between the

Crown dependencies and overseas territories and the law enforcement and tax authorities here. We think that should be public—there is absolutely no doubt about that—but it should also be shared elsewhere. If miscreants are identified by the Revenue or the police here, I hope that there will be a very swift phone call to the appropriate authorities elsewhere so that they, too, can follow the money.

**Paul Flynn:** Does the hon. Gentleman think it is significant that China has £44 billion invested in the Cayman Islands and £49 billion in the British Virgin Islands? Is not one of the reasons why the Government might not want to act against these tax havens that they are ingratiating themselves with the Chinese, who are busy destroying our steel industry?

**Stewart Hosie:** I suspect that the Chinese authorities are interested in that £93 billion just as much as we are, because I suspect that much of it is not there—how can I put this gently?—officially. They have as big a problem with money being fleeced from their system as we and other countries have with ours.

Another issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, and by my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan), is the question of where the money actually is and how it is set to work for its beneficiaries. As we know, cash funds do not actually sit in the Cayman Islands or the Bahamas. One of the biggest centres for the cash is London, and we can see where some of that money is spent. For example, hundreds, if not thousands, of rather expensive properties in London have been bought by persons unknown. We have therefore called for radical reform to address tax avoidance, outright evasion and criminality and to deliver fairness across the board so that the very wealthy pay the tax that is due in precisely the same way as those on more modest earnings.

The starting point for paying tax in this country is the Revenue knowing precisely who owns what assets and what income is derived from them. In short, that means a public register of beneficial ownership of companies, and not just in the UK, but for the Crown dependencies and the overseas territories as well, precisely so that nobody can hide assets or incomes through an opaque structure of a company registered in an overseas territory, registered by a Panamanian lawyer while the money comes swiftly to a bank account in London and is parked in a multi-million pound mansion in Mayfair through an anonymous shell company.

That also means taking serious action on trusts. The argument that the Prime Minister used was that he would not have got the agreement had trusts been included. He argued—possibly correctly historically—that those trusts were set up in order to allow sophisticated investors to invest in dollar-denominated stock. But times have changed. I took a cursory look at the stock exchange website this morning. On its “frequently asked questions” page, I saw the following question: “Can a company have its securities traded in currencies other than sterling, for example euros and dollars?” The answer was, “Yes, your shares can be denominated and traded in any freely available currency you choose.” Indeed, the stock exchange launched a Masala rupee-denominated bond last week. The old arguments that these structures are required for non-sterling trades or

investment are now simply wrong. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath put it, even if the Prime Minister was right some years ago, he is wrong now and public opinion has changed dramatically.

That brings me to what else the Prime Minister said on Monday. He said that he has published all the information on his tax returns for the past six years. He has provided details about money inherited from and given to him by his family. He has published other sources of income and his salary. He dealt specifically with the shares that he and his wife held in a unit trust called Blairmore Holdings, set up by his late father. That, from our point of view, was precisely the right thing to do. However, in a sense, all of that is irrelevant because it did not actually address the fundamental issue of individuals holding assets through overseas shell companies and being able to hide them and their income from the tax man.

Also, in describing the actions that the Government are taking to deal with tax evasion, aggressive tax avoidance and international corruption more broadly, the Prime Minister said that they have put an end to rich homeowners getting away without paying stamp duty because their houses are enveloped within companies. He said that they had made 40 changes to close loopholes, and they have sought agreement on global standards for the automatic exchange of information, and in June this year, as the Minister has pointed out, the UK will become the first country in the G20 to have a public register of beneficial ownership so that everyone can see who really owns and controls each company. We recognise that there has also been work on base erosion and profit shifting.

All of that is to be welcomed. What we are saying is that we need to go further. It will simply not be enough for the police and the tax authorities to see beneficial ownership of companies registered in Crown dependencies; it must be public, so that the citizens of those countries and ours can see who precisely owns and benefits from what. Also, while we welcome the publication of beneficial ownership of companies in the UK, I ask the Government to ensure that sufficient resources are now dedicated to HMRC so that it can forensically scrutinise the sources of income to ensure that they are legal and that the tax due is paid. Of course, as I said earlier, the Government must also pass on to other authorities the details of any miscreants suspected of looting cash from other countries.

I am delighted that this subject is now under real scrutiny. I am also delighted that we have gone wider than the parochial. Oxfam has pointed out how significant this is in its report “Ending the Era of Tax Havens”. It gives encouragement to the Government, stating:

“The UK is especially well placed to show leadership here because it controls or directly influences by far the largest network of tax havens in the world. This network, encompassing the UK’s Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories and centred on the City of London, is estimated to account for nearly a quarter of global financial services provided to nonresidents within a jurisdiction. Taken together, this UK entity would sit at the top of the ranking in the Tax Justice Network’s Financial Secrecy Index”.

That is not something we should be proud of. However, Oxfam goes on to talk about the opportunity the Government have, saying that success in tackling corruption and tax evasion could be transformative not just in terms of our revenue, but in terms of the fight against global poverty and inequality, which, for the SNP, is just as important.

I will end by saying one thing to the Government: the cat is out of the bag. This is not just about Mossack Fonseca; this is the tip of the iceberg. The public will not allow this matter to be quietly swept under the carpet again.

2.10 pm

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie). Although there are probably some things we would disagree on, there are a couple of issues on which we do agree. One is that it is welcome that we are having this debate on the Floor of the House today. The other is the fear that the next tax haven to be listed—this time it would affect ordinary working people—might be England if the Scottish Labour party gets its way after the elections this May and makes tax rates for working people higher there than they are south of the border.

It is always good, as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, to be discussing on the Floor of the House how we get in the tax that is owed. During Prime Minister’s Question Time, I think I heard the Leader of the Opposition refer to tax as partly a donation. I can understand why he said that, but let us be clear: a donation is something people voluntarily give to a charity, as I do out of my salary; a tax is a legal requirement to pay something—it is not a donation or an act of charity.

As a member of the Committee, I sat on our recent inquiry into Google, which is perhaps one of the cases that has helped to prompt the debate on this issue over the last few months. We focused a lot on some of the offshore locations, but we also had references to things such as the “double Irish” and the “Dutch sandwich”, which helped to reduce the company’s tax liability. Neither of those relates to offshore territories; they both involve jurisdictions that are members of the EU. It is therefore important that, as we work across the world to try to deal with tax evasion and avoidance, we make sure that other nation states give these issues the attention they deserve. *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. I am sorry to disturb the hon. Gentleman, but there is quite a lot of chattering going on, and I am finding it quite difficult to hear him.

**Kevin Foster:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In its report, the Committee was clear that HMRC should try to lead a debate about openness and tax rules. In that instance, the issue was revenues and the discussion of information with HMRC. It is easy to grandstand in such debates, but it is important to have not a knee-jerk reaction, but a considered debate about what information is available publicly, because there cannot just be specific rules for individual companies. If we change our general principle of not discussing individual taxpayer data, there are obviously some pitfalls to that, as well as some potential benefits, as we see when we look at deals such as the one with Google. However, the Committee felt that HMRC could lead a debate on that.

The report summarises some of the issues involved in judging whether the Google deal was the best deal that could have been done. It is worth noting, however, that the debate was based on previous tax rules, not today’s tax rules; effectively, we were having a debate about things as they existed some years ago—in some cases,

[Kevin Foster]

11 years back, when many Members sitting here today were not actually in the House—and about laws that have, in many cases, changed.

What came out of the Committee's discussion is that HMRC's performance is being looked at more widely, and the Committee regularly looks at it. It is encouraging to see some of the figures that have been published on the reduction of the tax gap—not least the corporation tax gap, which has gone from 14% to 7%. That is welcome. Yes, there is more we can do to drive down that 7%, but it is far better to be talking about 7% than 14%.

As has been referred to in the debate, the tax haven where a hedge fund manager could pay as low a tax rate as the person who cleaned their office was the UK six years ago. I have always felt that tackling that was one of the best things done under the coalition Government, because it seemed innately unfair that someone sitting within a few miles of this building could use capital gains tax rules to pay a low rate on a substantial income—indeed, a lower rate than a person earning the minimum wage for cleaning their office.

Having had discussions with Anguilla's Public Accounts Committee recently, I welcome a number of things about HMRC's having the ability to get information from, and share information with, the Crown dependencies. I agree with the hon. Member for Dundee East that we should be as diligent in handing information to tax authorities in developing countries via such information-sharing arrangements as we are in using information to enforce our own tax system. I suspect there will always be a debate about exactly what information we share with countries with more repressive regimes, but where the line is purely about avoiding taxation, we should be prepared to co-operate, provided that there are assurances about the standards that will be applied afterwards as part of investigations under the relevant nation's criminal justice system.

In terms of how the Government and the UK engage with these authorities, it is worth bearing in mind that some of the regulations involved are very complex. There is perhaps a debate to be had about the fact that we currently appoint governors, who effectively act as the Head of State, for three years, with their term being extendable to four. There is perhaps a debate to be had with Foreign Office colleagues about whether it would make more sense to have a longer appointment, to allow governors to build a relationship with the authorities in a country; to build a knowledge of the system there; and to be able to engage more, and to give difficult messages, on behalf of the UK, in a way that a three-year term perhaps does not allow.

We should be clear that being a governor is not about going round in a feathered hat being saluted by everyone; it should be about being part of building a strong and lasting bond between the UK and territories that look to us for support, particularly in the realm of defence and overseas development. We should have people who engage with territories very strongly and who build up their governance systems, but who also have a deep knowledge of those territories and a deep relationship with them. We can then have the tougher discussions we need to have about areas where those territories are sovereign, but where their decisions have a clear impact on us as the home nation.

That said, I welcome the agreements we have managed to sign. I recognise that this is a global problem. Panama is one of the few countries not to have signed up to some of the international agreements, and one of the key issues is what further steps we take against nations that do not do that. Again, however, that should be part of a proper global debate, and we should not pick off individual jurisdictions. If we do that, people will simply find the next jurisdiction that is not honouring transparency. This needs to be a slightly wider debate than just picking on individual circumstances or an individual issue.

Likewise, we need a debate so that there is clarity, for example, about which types of investment many people use—perfectly legitimately and perfectly lawfully—in this country. We have heard of trade unions, pension funds and councils that use unit trusts and that pay their taxes here. At the same time, however, we have to open the envelope on shell companies that are basically just being used to hide who actually owns something, so that we can have that information and ensure that HMRC can get the tax it is due.

I was slightly disappointed that the opening of the debate seemed to focus more on a party political attack than on a measured discussion of how we ensure that the taxes legislated for by this Parliament are collected so that they can be spent by this Parliament. In reading the motion, I thought it was strange that there was no reference to the recent Public Accounts Committee report on the Google taxation deal. Likewise, I was disappointed that there was no reference to the tax transparency Bill—to give it a rather snappier title than its official one—introduced by a former Cabinet Minister, who is now a Labour Back Bencher. Instead, the motion seems like a party political policy document, which means it is not something I feel inclined to support.

This debate is welcome. It is safe to say that all of us recognise that there is more work to be done to capture those revenues that escape all taxation in all jurisdictions, and the UK can also play a role in building the capability of developing nations to crack down on tax avoidance that costs them even more than it costs us. This is ultimately about ensuring that those tax rates that are set here and that we believe are fair are paid. That is the nub of this debate and it must be the focus of future work.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), I should say that 11 Members wish to speak and I want to start the wind-ups at about 3.30 pm. If speakers take about eight minutes or less, everybody will get in.

2.20 pm

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): As the co-founder and chair of the all-party parliamentary group on anti-corruption, I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to today's debate.

The issues under discussion are, rightly, very high on the public agenda, and a great number of my constituents have contacted me to share their concerns. They, like many others, have a strong sense of both the real and the perceived injustice in our system, whereby the vast

majority of people in this country play by the same rules and have very little choice about the contribution they make to the public purse. This is not about envy or anger at wealth, whether it be earned or inherited; it is about the fact that those at the top end of the income scale seem to play by an entirely different set of rules. That, understandably, makes people angry, and the Government must take genuine steps to level the playing field and regain the public's trust.

One of the assertions that has been made in representations to me is that the solutions to the problem are easy. Although I do not necessarily subscribe to that view, I do think that there are a few relatively simple steps that the Government could take to make a significant difference. Those steps would bring about much greater transparency about the ownership of individual and company assets and wealth, and enable a very clear view of who the beneficiaries are of investments and funds, whether they are held here in the UK or in offshore trusts and accounts. It is essential to deal properly not only with aggressive tax avoidance that Parliament never intended to be pursued, but with tax evasion and other criminal activity, such as fraud and corruption. Too often, both issues go hand in hand.

In his statement on the Panama papers on Monday, the Prime Minister acknowledged:

“Under current legislation it is difficult to prosecute a company that assists with tax evasion”.—[*Official Report*, 11 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 26.]

He is absolutely correct. In fact, the challenge is understated, and I will briefly explain why. At present, under UK law, in order to hold a company criminally liable, prosecutors must identify an individual sufficiently senior within the organisation—usually at board level—as its “controlling mind” with knowledge of the offence. In an increasingly globalised world where multinational organisations, which have very complicated structures and management arrangements, are the norm, that sets an extremely high bar for prosecutors to cross. By contrast, in the US a company can be held vicariously liable in criminal law for the actions of its employees undertaken in the course of their employment.

The Government seemed to acknowledge that inadequacy in UK law and included proposals in their 2015 manifesto to introduce corporate criminal liability for economic offences. Yet by September 2015 those proposals were quietly dropped, a fact that came to light only in response to a written parliamentary answer. The grounds stated by the Minister who gave that answer were that

“there is little evidence of economic crime going unpunished.”

That was, frankly, a ridiculous assertion, and I hope that the Panama papers have finally put that notion to bed.

It is clearly unacceptable that, here in the UK, prosecutors of economic crime—tax evasion, corruption and fraud—are effectively operating with one hand tied behind their backs. Indeed, David Green, the director of the Serious Fraud Office—the law enforcement agency tasked with prosecuting the most serious and complex economic crimes—has been clear for some time about the inadequacy of our law. As he pointed out in an interview with the *Evening Standard* in January, the identification principle “is difficult because inevitably the email trail tends to dry up at middle management and evidentially it is hard to prove.”

I put that point to the Prime Minister on Monday, and I was glad to hear him commit to going away and looking at the proposals. I hope that Ministers are listening carefully to this debate and that those at the Ministry of Justice in particular will report back to him as a matter of urgency. The proposal is to extend the application of the section 7 offence—which I will explain—not only to tax evasion, but to all economic crime.

This is the nub of the issue. As the Prime Minister announced on Monday—indeed, he had announced it previously, but no follow-up action has been taken as yet—the Government intend to legislate so that corporates can be held criminally liable for failing to prevent the facilitation of tax evasion. That is an acceptance that the current corporate liability framework, which applies to all economic crimes, does not work.

The Government propose to do that by creating an offence modelled on section 7 of the Bribery Act 2010, introduced by the last Labour Government, that holds a company liable if it fails to take “adequate steps” to prevent bribery by its employees. In other words, it puts the onus on companies to ensure that proper compliance procedures are in place and holds them criminally liable if they do not do so. That model, which already applies to the offence of bribery, will apply to tax evasion under the Government's proposals.

Why stop at tax evasion? Why not extend the provision to cover failure to prevent other crimes, such as fraud or money laundering, as promised in the Conservative party's 2015 manifesto? The director of the Serious Fraud Office has suggested that that is a workable solution. Back in 2013, he highlighted the benefits:

“Such an approach would merely add a criminal sanction to existing obligations; it would assist in the reform of poor corporate culture which contributed to the crash; it would underpin the recovery by encouraging clean and stable markets; it would increase investor confidence, assist in more rapid prosecutions and dovetail well with deferred prosecution agreements.”

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned earlier the situation in America. None of the bankers in this country was held to account for the crash, but a number of those in America were. Does she agree that something should be done about that?

**Catherine McKinnell**: Absolutely. My hon. Friend raises a very important point. The banks in America have paid significant fines as a result of their behaviour ahead of the crash, but it has been significantly more difficult to ensure that justice is done here. That is the very reason why the issue needs to be addressed. The solution is very simple and workable. The Government already intend to legislate on tax evasion, so it would simply be a case of expanding the number of offences to which the legislation applies.

I strongly urge the Government to look closely at part 2 of schedule 17 to the Crime and Courts Act 2013. It sets out a useful list of offences, covering all manner of fraudulent and corrupt offences—from false accounting and forgery, to fraudulent trading, bribery and money laundering—that the Government's proposed new offence could equally apply to. The work is all done. The ducks are lined up; the Government just need to implement the change.

The revelations in the Panama papers represent a pivotal moment that the Government must not squander. The Panama papers have not just highlighted issues

[Catherine McKinnell]

relating to tax evasion and, indeed, avoidance, but raised even greater questions about illicit financial flows, laundered money and the proceeds of crime, and about how companies exploit tax havens and secretive jurisdictions to facilitate that. Ahead of next month's anti-corruption summit the Government should send out to the rest of the world the clearest of messages that the UK is serious about tackling economic crime in all of its forms, and its facilitation. I urge the Government to take the opportunity to take this important step to arm our law enforcement agencies and courts with the ability properly to hold companies to account.

2.29 pm

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell). She made an excellent speech, at the start of which she summarised very well the feeling of public anger about an elite who seem to live by rules different from those that apply to the average member of society. I agree with her.

I want to speak along the same lines as the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), who has just left the room, and talk about the underlying issues. Why is there such public anger about this issue? Tax avoidance and tax evasion have been going on for hundreds of years. Smuggling was tax evasion. When people filled in their windows to avoid the window tax, that was tax avoidance. Why has there recently been a crescendo of public anger? It cannot be simply because the Panama papers have been in the press. I argue that it is caused by underlying economics and the fissures that emerged in our society after the great credit crunch in 2008.

**Mr Anderson:** The hon. Gentleman might want to consider the fact that the poor people of the country are lectured constantly by the Government, who keep telling them that we are all in this together. Quite clearly, we are not.

**James Cartlidge:** We have a record low in the number of workless households. Worklessness is the single biggest cause of poverty. The Government have a very strong record on dealing with poverty, and I will come on to that.

**Debbie Abrahams:** It is generous of the hon. Gentleman to give way, but I have to challenge him on his last point. There are more people in work who are in poverty than ever before.

**James Cartlidge:** I simply do not agree with that. I want to start by focusing on the action that has been taken, because I do not think that the anger out there is caused by a lack of action.

**Kevin Foster:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**James Cartlidge:** May I just make one point first, although it is lovely to have so popular a speech and so many interventions? On the action we have taken, as my hon. Friends the Members for Torbay (Kevin Foster) and for Newark (Robert Jenrick) have said, there has

been a 50% fall in the corporation tax gap. I am sure that that is the sort of point on which my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay wants to support me.

**Kevin Foster:** I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He has already been very generous with interventions. Does he agree that one of the things that really used to anger people was that an office cleaner could be paying a higher rate of tax than a hedge fund manager who worked in the same office? That was happening not in a tax haven, but here in the UK, and it is right that it was tackled.

**James Cartlidge:** That is an excellent point. It was a fundamental injustice, and we dealt with it. In the latest Budget, we announced a series of measures to tackle tax avoidance on matters such as hybrid mismatch, VAT evasion through online sales and the general anti-abuse rule. We will introduce a new penalty of 60% of tax due in all GAAR cases that are successfully tackled. We have brought in a long list of measures on matters such as serial tax avoidance and offshore avoidance.

On the broader point about the wider economics, I founded a small business in 2004—a mortgage broker specialising in the shared ownership sector—and it was obvious to me in the build-up to 2008 what was coming down the track. I believe that the then Government were trying to tackle inequality through debt. In those days, two potential homebuyers, one of whom was relatively wealthy and well educated, and the other who had less good skills and was less able to command such a salary, could both obtain similar levels of mortgage through the extraordinary measures that existed at the time, such as self-certified and sub-prime mortgages. We all know where that led.

In terms of public debt, the then Government's main measure to deal with inequality was tax credits, which led to a £30 billion increase in in-work benefits. We paid for that increase in benefit spending on the national overdraft at a time when the country was doing pretty well and the world economy was relatively strong.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify something? He seemed to be saying that less intelligent people should not be allowed to have mortgages. Is that what he was saying?

**James Cartlidge:** I think that the hon. Gentleman should withdraw that remark. I find that genuinely offensive. What I said was that the rules were very lax, and self-certification meant that someone on a low salary could get a very large mortgage, just like someone who earned a large amount. That is exactly the point that I was making. We all know that that led to a huge crash in 2008.

We have one fundamental question to answer. How, in the current economic context, do we go about trying to deliver a fairer economy, which we all want, where more people share in the growth that we have been able to deliver? We need strong measures to counter tax avoidance. We need the public to feel as though we are all in this together, and that we are all paying our fair share.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): On the point about everyone paying their way, does my hon. Friend welcome the fact that under this Government, the top 1% of

earners are paying 28% of tax, which is a far higher percentage than under the Labour Government? *[Interruption.]*

**James Cartlidge:** There are shouts from Labour Members, because I made that point earlier, but it is worth repeating. I am delighted that my hon. Friend made it, because it is so strong.

**Callum McCaig:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**James Cartlidge:** I am very popular today.

**Callum McCaig:** The hon. Gentleman is exceptionally popular today. The point about the richest 1% paying the largest amount of tax has been baffled about a number of times today as though it is some sign of virtue. It is, in fact, a sign of the gross inequality that exists in the country, which needs to be addressed.

**James Cartlidge:** It is a sign that the rich are paying more tax. How does that make society more unequal?

Let me talk about the measures that we should be pursuing. Yes, we should be cracking down on aggressive tax avoidance, but if we are to help people across society to have a share, we need measures such as the national living wage, which was introduced on 1 April by a Conservative one nation Government. There are those who say that the national living wage is not generous enough. They have obviously not been reading *The Guardian*, which recently used *The Economist's* Big Mac index to prove that the national living wage is more generous than the minimum wage in any other European country except Luxembourg. Only in Luxembourg can someone buy more burgers with the minimum wage than they can with the national living wage in this country. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) asked what this had to do with tax avoidance. The underlying issue is fairness. It is about how we achieve an economy in which there is a widespread sense that everyone has opportunity and the chance to earn a decent wage.

We are delivering that in circumstances far more adverse than those that faced the Government before 2010. We have had a small majority and the first coalition since the second world war. We have had the biggest deficit since the second world war—11.5% of GDP—which we have cut by two thirds. In that context, it is difficult to grow our way out of such a problem and deliver fairness. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Glasgow South keeps chuntering, but he is not adding a great deal to the debate.

**Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): My hon. Friend is talking about fairness and about some of the challenges that we faced with the deficit that we inherited. Is he not proud that in those circumstances, not only have we shifted income tax from the lowest paid to the highest paid, but we have helped small businesses? Through the reforms to business rates, we will take many smaller businesses out of business rates altogether while making multinationals pay more.

**James Cartlidge:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to mention small businesses. I used to say to people that I ran a small business, but measured by the amount of corporation tax we paid, we were bigger than Google. The fact is that those who run small businesses feel as

though they have to comply. They cannot afford expensive lawyers. I agree with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North about the sense that there is an elite who live by different rules. We have to deal with that, but we must not run away from the key point—my concluding point—with which my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary also concluded, namely that when we talk about transparency, the transparency that really matters to the public is about our ideals and our beliefs.

What do we really believe? I fundamentally believe in the free market. I believe in capitalism. I believe in individuals getting out there and using their creativity to earn their way in the world. We cannot go back to paying our way through debt and unsustainable public finances. In the circumstances, we need to maximise the tax that we get, but we also need to maximise the investment into the country from companies that we have heard the Labour Front Benchers criticise. Those big professional firms in London are massive employers in this country. We need to expand our exports from the services sector. Basically, we need a positive, free enterprise agenda with a fair sense that companies and individuals are paying their fair share, which does not denigrate the free market but creates sustainable growth to deliver prosperity for all.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. I have now to announce the result of a deferred Division on the question relating to employment agencies etc. The Ayes were 307 and the Noes were 241, so the Ayes have it.

*[The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.]*

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Everybody has been speaking for just over 10 minutes, rather than eight minutes, which is the informal guide. We now need to keep to about seven minutes or less, if we want to get everybody in.

2.39 pm

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What has been highlighted by the publication of the so-called Panama papers is that we do not have a fair tax system. We are not all in it together, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) said so eloquently. Those exposed by this scandal have knowingly exploited tax avoidance measures for their own financial gain. While it is not technically illegal, aggressive tax avoidance has been argued to be against the spirit and intention of the law and of the will of this House. What is really shocking is that Heads of Government are involved, including our own Prime Minister, and that poses fundamental questions about politics and politicians. Once again, it threatens public confidence and trust in politics and politicians. These people are meant to be providing leadership to our citizens, and such involvement calls into question their attitudes and values, as well as their motives for seeking public office.

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend think the comments that have been made—for instance, the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) said, “If you are not wealthy, you are a low achiever”—have added to the public's distrust of politicians in this place?

**Debbie Abrahams:** Such a comment adds to the dissatisfaction with politics and politicians as a whole, as I have said. I thought it was a very insulting statement.

As Members on both sides of the House have already said, the Panama papers provide more evidence of the existence of a powerful and indifferent elite, for whom the accumulation of personal wealth at the expense of their fellow citizens is paramount. The evasion and avoidance of tax means that less money is collected by the Exchequer for our pensioners, disabled people and the vulnerable, as well as for doctors, nurses, teachers and all the other public servants funded by public money. Fundamentally, dodging paying a fair share of tax is contributing to growing inequality in this country and across the world, and tax havens are at the heart of this.

Many Members will have seen Oxfam's report last month. It says the UK heads the world's biggest financial secrecy network, which spans its Crown dependencies and overseas territories, and is centred on the City of London. Collectively, it is estimated to account for nearly a quarter of global financial services provided to non-residents within any given jurisdiction. The UK takes prime position out of all jurisdictions across the world in the Tax Justice Network's financial secrecy index, which is hardly something we should be proud of.

The National Audit Office has estimated that the tax gap is £34 billion a year, which is £1 billion more than in 2009. That is equivalent to a third of the NHS's national budget. About half of the tax gap is accounted for by tax fraud, which includes tax evasion, criminal activity and the hidden or grey economy. When we consider the cuts proposed in last month's Budget in relation to the personal independent payment for disabled people, we can see that figure for half of the tax gap would pay the whole annual budget for people on the disability living allowance and PIP.

HMRC's compliance units, now merged into the fraud investigation service, tackle all aspects of non-compliance. According to the NAO, they do not record how much of the revenue they successfully recover relates to tax evasion, but the NAO estimates that the figure is about 30%. One of the issues that HMRC has to face is the need to balance what it can get in quickly, as low-hanging fruit, from low-risk, low-visibility and lower-gain operations with what it can get in from the high-risk, high-visibility and higher-gain and more complex criminal cases. This is where political leadership comes in. Such leadership has been seriously absent, as I shall mention later.

In spite of the 2013 G8 commitment to a common reporting standard at a global level, the Government have dragged their feet and obfuscated on comprehensive action on such measures. I welcome what the Government have proposed this week, but why—six years later—is that happening now? As I asked in an intervention, I would be grateful to the Financial Secretary if he responded on how much of the £266 million that has been specifically allocated to address tax fraud is to deal with tax evasion.

HMRC now has additional staff, with 670 new staff acting on tax evasion, but why were nearly 6,000 HMRC staff let go between 2013 and 2015? Has the 10% reduction in the number of HMRC staff since 2008 actually affected the collection of the moneys owed because of tax evasion?

As I say, I welcome the additional measures that have been taken, but the absolute outrage at this is clear from my mailbox, which I am sure is the same for other Members. There is palpable public anger. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) summed it up perfectly: when people are really struggling, it is shocking to see such absolute abuse by a tiny minority.

We need to look at this in the context of the Government's other benefits and tax measures. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the regressive Budgets during the past six years have left people on low and middle incomes proportionately worse off. That is a result of the tax and social security measures. Projections for the next five years show that there will be increasing poverty and inequalities. All of that compounds the anger that people are feeling. In such a context, the vast accumulation of wealth by the wealthiest is very shocking. In the past 15 years, those in the top 1% have increased their wealth by 79%, which is £3.7 million per person, while someone in the bottom 10% has seen a rise of just 45%, which is £1,600 per person.

In addition to the Prime Minister's admission in his statement last week that he had benefited from an investment in an offshore trust based in a tax haven, he intervened in 2013 to oppose the beneficiaries of offshore trusts being named in proposed EU money laundering rules. This is what I mean by the need for political leadership. There has been an absence of political leadership, contrary to what can be deemed fair. I am conscious of the time, so I will not pursue that point. Our proposals will make a real difference, and I hope that Members will look at them.

2.47 pm

**Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con):** Forgive me for not being in the Chamber at the start of the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was not here because I had absolutely no intention of speaking. However, when I listened to the shadow Chancellor's speech, I found myself understanding his frustrations and understanding the points he made. I guess the problem is that his solution seems to be some sort of socialist utopia, which I do not think will work. I see no example in history of its doing so. I have, however, been forced to consider what a viable solution to this state of affairs might be.

Understandably, as many colleagues have already illustrated ably in their speeches, the general public are angry and frustrated. There is a palpable sense that there has been a breakdown in trust not only in us in this Chamber, but in systems of government, whether it is the tax system or, given the latest dreadful case in Burton, the social work system. Across the board, the public are deeply mistrustful, and increasingly so, as well as deeply cynical. That is understandable, because this is not the only tax scandal. We have had Google and many others, including in relation to corporation tax.

I can understand why the average man and woman in the street is thinking, "If it is good for me, why is it not good for them?" The response should not be hypocrisy and it certainly should not be envy; it should be to ask what we can practically do in the globalised economy we all inhabit. I readily admit that there are failings in our current capitalist model, and I rarely see contributions from people who recognise that or, indeed, who have

thought about what might replace it. A notable exception is my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman).

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** The hon. Gentleman mentioned public anger. Measures against the recession have been going on for about six years. The public are weary of that, just as the public in America are weary of what is happening there. The public feel aggrieved at us because the recession and the measures to deal with it have been too harsh and have gone on for too long. That is one reason why people feel that they bear the biggest part of the burden.

**Dr Lee:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, but the political and philosophical point in it is that he does not believe that reducing the size of the state is necessarily in the interests of the majority. I do, and that is where we diverge, but the hon. Gentleman is right that there is a sense that the middle are carrying the burden and the very rich are not. However, all these things that we have been discussing, about which I have no knowledge—I wish I had money in trusts, offshore or elsewhere—are legal. If something is legal, I believe that it is legitimate. To those who believe that there is a moral component to paying tax, I say, “Get real.”

We probably need to look at the system first. Earlier, I referred to the corporation tax scandal, Google and the like. I know that the Government have made significant progress on reducing corporation tax, but corporation tax is out of date in a globalised economy. Let us just scrap it. We either make a decision not to spend £42 billion, or we move to a form of taxation that is not so easily avoidable, be it employee taxation, a sales tax or a property tax. However, the perpetuation of corporation tax in the world I see is plainly nonsense.

On the point about London property ownership, it is all about avoiding stamp duty. Scrap stamp duty. We should either not spend the £7 billion or find another way of levying the tax. Perhaps people should be taxed for ownership on an ongoing basis. Perhaps council taxes should be increased. I do not know—one can choose. However, corporation tax and stamp duty are clearly not fit for purpose and are easily avoidable.

The other challenge is intergenerational inequity. Significant sums of money are tied up in particular generations. Much has been said about the Prime Minister's inheritance tax arrangements, which are totally to be expected—anybody with any wealth will mitigate inheritance tax. Who in that position would not? Let us not be hypocrites. The problem is that significant wealth is tied up in a particular generation, who were born post war. How will we facilitate the transfer of that wealth fairly and equitably? Answers on a postcard, please. At the moment, we do not have a system that works, and we need one.

I move on to transparency and the need for simplification. I am attracted to the Scandinavian—Norwegian and Swedish—model of publishing tax and wealth online. I support that; I have absolutely nothing—as far as I am aware—to hide. When I mention that to Conservative colleagues in particular, they worry about privacy. If that is founded—and those arguments are strong—the Prime Minister should not have published his tax returns, and nobody else should do so. It should be all or nothing. Each and every one of us in the Chamber, and

indeed those watching in the Public Gallery, has a share in our democracy and in our Government functioning. For that share to be valued, we must all trust that it is legitimate and fair and that everyone is playing by the rules. I am therefore drawn to the Norwegian model, with all the necessary clarifications of legitimate application.

**James Carlidge:** Which Norwegian model? There is one to do with the sex trade, there is another to do with negotiations for the referendum—is my hon. Friend talking about the tax one?

**Dr Lee:** Of course I am talking about the tax system. There have been some concerns about it, to do with extortion and potential for kidnapping the very wealthy. However, if the system is applied with a log in and all the necessary things that need to be put in place, I do not see a problem with it. In the first couple of years, everyone will be interested—twitchy curtains—in what everyone else is earning, but after that, things will settle down.

I have contributed today and I feel strongly about this because if we do not have trust, not just in us but in this establishment and in Government, we cannot achieve much. The challenges that the country faces with the long-term sustainability of health and welfare, particularly pensions, mean that there will be some difficult decisions for whoever is in power. For them to be implemented, we must be trusted. Everything that we do here should be about that. That is why I think that our priorities should be transparency, simplification and scrapping taxes that have long been out of date.

**Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con):** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his interesting speech. Does he believe that tax transparency will automatically lead to greater trust among the electorate? I feel that the electorate has reached the point where transparency may not necessarily lead to greater trust.

**Dr Lee:** I agree with my hon. Friend that initially no, it would not. However, in time, once the system beds down, it will. The richest man in Norway, who published all his wealth and income, is now extremely popular because it turns out that he is a great philanthropist. People do not have a problem with others being successful. I certainly do not detect that in the British public. However, I think that there is a suspicion that something underhand is going on in some quarters and, as the Prime Minister says, transparency is the best disinfectant.

We need to act because trust matters. Without trust, we cannot implement what is necessary, whatever the policies are. Anything that the Government can do to encourage the public to trust in the system and in this institution will get my support.

2.56 pm

**Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab):** I am happy to start on a note of consensus with the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) that this is all about trust. The public have reacted so fiercely against recent events because there is a collapse of trust in us. The expenses scandal was a screaming nightmare, and public trust reached rock bottom. It is now subterranean—it has got worse. An examination of our

[Paul Flynn]

standards in this House is currently taking place, and I urge every hon. Member to contribute to it. Democracy itself—the political system—is under threat.

The country is rightly angry about the unfairness in the system. The other day in the House, we heard the most insulting speech, which will deepen the sense of alienation between the Government and the Opposition. I have been here a long time and I recall an incident in which the person who made that speech revealed to the newspapers how he made some of his money. He bought the council house of an elderly gentleman in London, who I think was a neighbour, on the basis that it would appreciate greatly in value and that the neighbour would not live very long. The agreement that the hon. Member made was that he would give the tenant, who would get a discount for being there for years, the money to buy the house and then the hon. Member would inherit the house. That is Tory morality, and it is morally repugnant. It is not the right to buy, but the right to greed. That man lectured us the other day and tried to castigate those whom he described contemptuously as low achievers.

The difficulty is the gulf between what the Government say and what they do. In March 2010, the Prime Minister made an impassioned speech about how he would clean up lobbying. He knew all about it: he was a lobbyist, and he was going to sort it all out. Where are we today, six years later? The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 has been passed, life for trade unions and charities is a bit more troublesome, but the big corporate lobbyists do not have to declare who their clients are. No worthwhile reform has happened. The Prime Minister has worried the minnows in the shallows, but the great fat salmon still swim by unhindered.

There is similarly no sincerity in the Government's determination to tackle the tax havens. I will give the House an interesting example. Lord Blencathra, who sees himself as the spokesman for the Cayman Islands, mocked the Prime Minister, saying that he had no intention of carrying out his threats to deal with tax havens and that they were a "purely political gesture"—those were Lord Blencathra's words. We have just heard that the First Minister of the Cayman Islands is putting two fingers up to the Prime Minister. They are not going to take any notice.

Let us look at the remarkable history of Lord Blencathra. It is a fascinating story that shows the laxness of our controls in this House. In 2012 I made a complaint about his behaviour. My complaint was taken to a Committee in the other House to examine. It suggested that he was in breach of the parliamentary code of conduct. His activities included lobbying the Chancellor about taxes affecting the Cayman Islands; he also facilitated an all-expenses paid trip to the islands for three prominent Members of this House. The Committee that deals with standards in the Lords held an investigation, and produced a remarkable document. Lord Blencathra explained that he was taking £12,000 a month in payment from the Cayman Islands, but that he was not lobbying Parliament or Government, but Members—or the other way around; he gave some spurious excuse. Quite remarkably, the decision was taken in 2012 that he had not been in breach of any rules of the House.

Two years later, the contract that Lord Blencathra had signed was leaked. It appeared that he had agreed in the contract to

"Promoting the Cayman Islands' interests in the UK and Europe by liaising with and making representations to UK ministers, the FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Members of Parliament in the House of Commons and Members of the House of Lords."

He put up a spirited defence, saying that he may have signed the contract but he had forgotten what he had agreed to, and anyway if he had signed it he had no intention of doing what it said. That is a most egregious breach of the code of conduct of the House—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. I have been listening very carefully. The hon. Gentleman knows that he is not to criticise Members of the other House directly or personally. He has been quoting from reports up until now. If he would desist from directly criticising Members of the other House, I would be very grateful.

**Paul Flynn:** These are not new matters, if I may say so. I have dealt with that matter now.

If the Government fail to act against their own Members, who are not trying to stop the abuses of tax havens but are actually lubricating them, how can we take them seriously? There is some agreement on this, and some pleasure in the House that this situation has happened, because it might expose the corruption that is so endemic and the huge sums disappearing into tax havens. Light has been shone on all that.

I believe that there is a political agenda behind those who have hacked into Mossack Fonseca's site. We do not know what that agenda is, and it might well be very sinister, but I will repeat my earlier point: one of the curious things here is what is happening with other nations. China has \$44 billion in the Cayman Islands and \$49 billion in the British Virgin Islands. Those are huge sums of money, but they are only part of the revelations—part is still to come. The reverberations of this pivotal scandal will spread for decades.

I am curious about the Government's reluctance to act against China in many other ways. We have already done a dreadful and financially disastrous deal over Hinkley Point, which might give us the most expensive electricity in the world, although the deal is now collapsing. The Government seem to want to ingratiate themselves with the Chinese Government. As a result, they are going soft on them in many ways. What is most damaging is that they are not taking sharp action against the undercutting of the steel industry that is affecting so many jobs here.

We have a strange relationship with the Cayman Islands. We provide them with great advantages, by providing their defence for them. The Government's permissiveness must stop. We will look to the Government to take the tough line that they have promised at the anti-corruption conference. They have not taken it before, so let us see them do it there.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. I am sorry to have to say that everyone has gone way over my informal speech limit, so I am going to have to impose a formal one, of six minutes per speaker. I hope that people will not take too many interventions.

3.5 pm

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I welcome the measures being taken to tackle tax avoidance, but I feel that the events of the past few days, and this debate in particular, are more about the politics of envy.

As a result of this Government's measures, the top 1% of earners are paying 28% of income tax, a figure that is likely to grow. In the figures released in the past couple of days by the Leader of the Opposition, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister we can see evidence of the fact that those who earn more, pay more, with the Prime Minister paying nearly £76,000 in income tax—double the amount that I earned as a nurse just months ago. That shows that there is equality in this country—if someone earns more, they pay more.

I accept the point of the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) that there is a difference between what is said in this House and what is done here. Opposition Members talk about reducing inequality in taxation but then oppose the measures that have seen 3 million of the lowest paid people in this country taken out of tax altogether. Opposition Members voted against measures, not just in the Budget just gone but in last year's Budget, that froze fuel duty, VAT and national insurance—which, again, help the lowest paid people in this country. The Labour party introduced the 10p tax rate, which actually hit the lowest paid. We will take no lectures on tax equality.

In the short time that I have, I shall touch on inheritance tax, which seems to be at the front when Opposition Members lead the march of their politics of envy. They assume that inheritance tax is there only to tackle people with high incomes and a lot of assets. My constituency, Lewes, is in the south-east, and I am seeing more and more low-income families whose houses—their family homes—have increased in price, through no fault of their own, so that they now fall into the bracket for inheritance tax, and are having to move out of their family home when that tax is due. They are asset rich but income poor. That means that people who are nurses, like me, or teachers or cleaners, and cannot afford to pay inheritance tax, are having to leave their local areas. That is a particular issue in London and the south-east. For Opposition Members to dismiss that issue and claim that only wealthy people with huge incomes pay inheritance tax is very misleading.

I have a couple of other points to make. The feeling that success is measured only in wealth is absolutely wrong. We do not simply measure success in wealth, but—I think my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge) made this point earlier—nor should we penalise those who have done well. It would be a sorry day if this country became a place in which, when someone has done well, has set up a successful business, is contributing to their local economy and is employing people, they were penalised, and not only that but frowned upon as well.

This party is trying to help people, whether they are on a low income or have been successful. We are the party of low taxation, whether people are poor or rich. *[Interruption.]* I see Opposition Members laughing, but I welcome the measures this Government have taken—both the crackdown on illegal tax avoidance and the measures introduced to take the poorest out of

taxation altogether. I hope that Opposition Members will desist from the politics of envy and deal with the problem of tax avoidance.

3.9 pm

**Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): First, let me reply to a few points that have been raised today. I agree that it was utterly wrong that a cleaner was paying more tax than a hedge fund manager—it stank. But thank God that cleaner was getting the national minimum wage, which was resisted by the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats: £3.60 instead of £1.90—that is the truth. I welcome the fact that low-paid people have been taken out of paying tax, but we must recognise that 1 million people in this country are on zero-hours contracts. That is 2.5% of the workforce who would not have been taxed no matter what the tax threshold was because their pay is so abysmal. Five million public sector workers in this country have seen their tax threshold rise, but they have also had their pay frozen or cut for the last eight years. So we must look at the whole picture, and not just say that the tax threshold has risen and therefore everything is okay. It isn't true.

The Prime Minister was right to say on Monday that nobody should traduce his dad. That was wrong, and the attack on his mother because she gave him a gift was not right either. It is normal and right that parents want to help their kids—all parents want to do that. In principle, if someone's dad or mother has expertise in any field, we would expect them to use that knowledge on behalf of their kids. That applies to stockbrokers as much as it does to stockmen, and to bakers as much as to bankers.

The real problem that the leak has exposed is the huge range of opportunities that are open only to the rich, wealthy and powerful in this nation, which proves that we simply are not all in this together. Whichever way this is dressed up, it is clear that those in the know have not only the opportunity or good fortune to make money in the first place, but when they get that money, many more avenues are open to them to allow them to keep their hands on it. That is one reason why eyebrows were raised across the country and in the House when Conservative Members pushed through cuts to income tax from 50% to 45%, and huge rises in the level at which inheritance tax cuts in, because they personally would gain from that. If anyone else did that we would say it was criminal, but those Members stood to gain personally from that measure.

The Prime Minister earns £150,000 a year doing a job that we all understand is really hard. He tops it up with £50,000 a year from renting out his house, and he gets another £40,000 a year from his savings and investments. He then turns round and says to poor people in this country, "I'm sorry, mate, but you've got to cough up another £14 a week for your bedroom tax"; or a disabled person who struggles to exist on benefits is told, "You don't need any more money than a fit person in your position, so you're going to have to give us back £30 a week." And what about the anger of 5 million public servants in this country who have been told time and again—this year for the eighth year running—"You must accept a real-terms cut in your living standards"?

**Dawn Butler:** I had a conversation with a Conservative Member who suggested to me that Members should declare their unearned earnings. Does my hon. Friend know what that means?

**Mr Anderson:** I haven't got a clue what unearned earnings means—I have never been in a position to have unearned any earnings. The Minister might be able to answer that when summing up the debate, and I would be interested to find that out.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is paid £120,000 a year. He also receives £34,000 a year in rental income from his house, because he lives at No. 11 Downing Street, as well as dividend payments of £44,000 a year. But what does he say to nurses, care workers, prison officers, police officers, and, yes, tax collectors? He says they must work harder and longer—

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Anderson:** Sit down.

The Chancellor says to those people, “You must work harder, and you must accept that you will have to work for longer before you get your pension.” How can he expect steel workers in this country, who are facing the possibility of a life on the dole, to believe that he really understands what they are going through?

The Mayor of London receives £143,000 for doing his day job, a quarter of a million pounds a year for writing for *The Daily Telegraph*, another quarter of a million in royalties from his books, and more money from his savings. Ordinary people in this country are fed up with carrying the can for the mistakes of the rich in this country—mistakes that led us into the economic crisis that is blighting the daily life of men and women who will never get the chance to save anything in the first place, let alone squirrel it away in the Caribbean, the Virgin Islands or the Channel Islands, where no questions are asked as long as people know the drill.

In two weeks the Trade Union Bill will come back to this House, and the most tightly regulated body in the country will face even more restrictions under the sad reality of what we have been told is the sunshine of transparency. The hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) spoke about trade unions not paying corporation tax, but I dare bet that them not doing that involved fully audited accounts that have been signed off, not hidden away. Why do we not subject financial markets, regulators and dealers to the same tight regulations that this Government intend to impose on trade unions, whose only job is to look after the interests of ordinary men and women in this country? Why do we not put the same effort into chasing tax dodgers as we do into hounding so-called benefit cheats—a process that traduces innocent people and sees their families rubbished? People are sanctioned without money for weeks on end, and at the end of that someone says, “Oh, we made a mistake.” What happened in the meantime? Why on earth do the Government think that people in this country are angry?

A lot has been said about the politics of envy, but this is about the politics of fairness. Make no mistake—this week we are seeing the end of the farce of “We're all in this together”. Hon. Members should read today's motion carefully because it is a roadmap, a loophole and a get-out for Conservative Members to say to people in this country, “We've heard your anger and frustration. We hear what you say. Let's work together and find a way out of this.” Instead, they have shut the door and want to carry on the dodgy deals. No matter what they say, yet again there is one law for the rich and one for the poor, and the people of this country will not stand for it.

3.16 pm

**Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con):** Like the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) I thought that the most important thing to come out of the Panama papers was the revelation of criminality and corruption here and abroad. I hope that HMRC and authorities around the world will take note and bring prosecutions, and that that will lead to further crackdowns on corruption, including in places such as China, where I would not like to be one of the individuals named in the Panama papers. It is right that the authorities should take action.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), I believe that this issue cuts to a question of trust, but the antidote to mistrust is not moralising or phoney outrage; it is credible, practical action that makes a difference and which the public can believe in. That is what the Government have been doing. Just because some Members of the House or the media have not followed this issue; just because the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) did not say anything about this matter during 13 years of the Labour Government; just because he sat on the British Overseas Territories Bill Committee and did not raise any issues of tax evasion; and just because he referred to the Labour Government taking control of the Turks and Caicos Islands as “medieval” and “extremely undemocratic”; and just because others have taken their eye off the ball, it does not mean that the Prime Minister or Government have done the same.

Let me say a few words about the key things that the Government have done, many of which have already been mentioned. Raising the issue of tax evasion at the G8 summit and creating the world's first public beneficial register of ownership was a major historic development. Many campaigned against it, actually for perfectly legitimate reasons, such as that it is a massive invasion of the privacy of law-abiding people. However, it is a huge step forward in the campaign against tax avoidance and evasion. It is happening in this country first, and we should be proud of that and not make it seem as if it is something that we take for granted. This Government were the first to do that, and other major economies around the world, like the United States, have not done that.

In one month the all-party group on corporate governance, which I help to run, will bring Chief Justice Leo Strine, who runs the Delaware Supreme Court, to Parliament. If Members care about this issue, and if this is not just phoney outrage, they should come to that event and question him about why Delaware—the state in which 90% of the major corporations of the United States are registered—has not yet followed the lead of this Prime Minister. We should encourage him to do the same.

The general anti-avoidance law was another major and controversial measure taken by the previous coalition Government. It was opposed by the Labour party. At the time, the Labour party spokesman said it was inadvisable to take this action until after the conclusion of the base erosion and profit shifting process, so it would not have happened under a Labour Government. It happened under a Conservative and Liberal Democrat Government.

**Mr Robin Walker:** My hon. Friend is making a very interesting point. May I add another initiative which, to be fair, was an initiative of the previous Labour

Government? The extractive industries transparency initiative was brought in by Labour, but it did not sign the UK up to it. This initiative is very important for raising tax revenue not just in the UK but around the world, and for making sure there is proper transparency as to where the extractive industries pay their money. Many of us, cross-party, campaigned for that. The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee said it was a mistake for the previous Government not to have signed up to it. This Government have, quite rightly, taken us into it.

**Robert Jenrick:** The point my hon. Friend makes is that practical and credible policies are the way to tackle this issue. We have seen results, contrary to some of the accusations we have heard today. According to the latest HMRC figures, the tax gap was higher in 2009-10 than it is today. The tax gap for corporations, large and small, was 40% to 50% higher. The tax gap for stamp duty was 40% higher under the previous Labour Government than it is today. Loopholes have been closed and practical measures are being brought in. By no means is this the end of the story—of course there is more to do—but I am pleased to say that the UK Government are genuinely leading the world on this issue. I want to see them do a lot more.

Lowering taxes is another important element in encouraging good behaviour, both by individuals and corporations. Corporation tax at 17%, versus 30% in the United States, will be a major step forward. Only the other day, President Obama was forced to take action against Pfizer because of its motivation to move to lower tax jurisdictions because of the 30% corporation tax in the United States.

There is more to do. I do not stand here for one minute claiming that this is mission accomplished, but we have to be clear that a lot of good steps have been taken. It is bad for business to have tax havens operating as they do today. Let me give Members a brief example from a previous career I had working as a managing director of an art business. Many valuable works of art are held in Panama and other such places. One dispute, over the ownership of a painting that had probably been seized by the Nazis, lasted for four years. The likely owners claimed that they did not know anything about the painting or who owned it. That has been revealed, thanks to the Panama papers, to be an outright lie. The Nahmad brothers, global collectors of art, were revealed to be the owners. I suspect that that painting will finally be going back to its legitimate owner in the near future. Tax havens operating as they do today is bad for individuals and bad for business, particularly in such disputes.

I want to close by commenting on tax privacy, an issue raised both in the press, by Polly Toynbee and others, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell. I think this would be a seriously detrimental step for the privacy of individuals in this country and all over the world. The last major occasion I can think of when this occurred in a large developed economy was during the civil war in the United States. To try to encourage compliance when income tax was introduced, tax returns were posted on the walls of courthouses across the United States. It was one of the most unpopular policies in the history of the United States and it did not increase compliance. The Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon, said:

“It was utterly useless from a Treasury perspective, just the gratification of idle curiosity and filling of newspaper space.”

Setting aside Prime Ministers and politicians, let us defend the right of individuals in this country to have privacy in their business and financial affairs. The legitimate, law-abiding citizens of this country should not be the losers from some individuals taking part in criminal acts.

3.24 pm

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP):** Well, it is some scandal, is it not, that has been leaked to us? Criminals, politicians and dictators have been hiding billions and billions of pounds in offshore accounts under the names of companies that do not actually exist. In fact, it is the scale and nature of the scandal that causes me to be so depressed about the nature of the debate we have had both in the Chamber this afternoon and in the run-up to this afternoon. It has taken us almost two weeks to actually start debating the issue. I did not quite buy everything that the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) had to say, but I thought he at least gave one of the most incisive speeches among this afternoon's contributions.

It is obvious that this issue is such a major hot potato for the two main parties in this Chamber: so hot that they seem to prefer to kick it back and forward—“You're worse than us.” “We're better than you.” Meanwhile, the public want us to debate the issues raised by the leaks. Forget the Twitter hashtags. Forget what has been written in the newspapers. Forget the sneering snobbery on one side and the braying mobs on the other. Let us actually deal with the issue. The issue is not about class; we can have an academic discussion about class later on. This is about criminality. That is what the motion seeks to address and what I think all of us in the Chamber really want to address.

It strikes me that there are two key ways in which we can tackle the problem: through the resources made available to the public agencies and through changes to legislation. As a lot of Members have mentioned, we can also look at beefing up international co-operation. I genuinely welcome the measures the Prime Minister announced in his statement to the House on Monday. The cross-agency taskforce and the funding that will come with it, and the other measures relating to legislation, are extremely important and to be welcomed. I would like the Minister, in summing up, to say whether Interpol will have a role to play. I have not heard anything about that at all. In fact, no public statement has been made on this issue on Interpol's website. I would therefore like to know whether Interpol will be invited to the corruption summit the Prime Minister will be hosting.

I am concerned about the pattern that forms when big scandals break, whether it is this one, the Volkswagen scandal or the Google scandal. This is a very British pattern—a pattern of only ever responding to events. I had hoped to hear more about how the Government intend to beef up the resources of HMRC to deal with this, because it is clearly not working. We have had some back and forth about more money, fewer staff and more staff, and fewer centres. It is clearly not working, so somebody really needs to step back and look at the problem within the context that actually exists. I had also hoped to hear more about how we would be trying to recoup some of the tax we are owed. I go back to the

[Stewart Malcolm McDonald]

point made earlier: this is about criminality. I can only hope that some of this will be getting talked about in the Paris talks today, at which, I understand, the UK Government are represented.

The Government made a lot of their ambition to secure economic security for Britain. They are absolutely right to mention that. The threats we face in terms of financial security are not to be taken lightly. In my view, they should be up there with the threats we face from terrorist organisations. There are different consequences, but both are absolutely serious. Just as the Prime Minister announced the recruitment of additional staff for agencies such as MI5 in the aftermath of attacks on our doorstep in Europe, he should seek to do the exact same thing for the public agencies dealing with criminal finance.

I do not have much time to go into the detail, but I would like the Government to reflect more about what happens in Australia with unexplained wealth orders. I shall not throw my full weight and support behind them, because I am hesitant about what they mean for the presumption of innocence and the right to silence. We should, however, look at the issue. Such orders are also being used successfully in Italy against gangs such as the Mafia.

The public require us to act and to stop the politicking that we have seen in some contributions today. This is a big challenge, and what we need to deal with it are the fine minds of this House—there are some, such as the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), the former Chair of the Public Accounts Committee—coming together on a cross-party or perhaps even a cross-parliamentary basis. We could tap in to some of the devolved Parliaments as well, and start to take the issue seriously. We should ignore all those who operate under a cloud of anonymity, who tell us, “You wouldn’t understand it; it is too difficult”. That just allows them to carry on doing what has got us to this point. Failure to act will keep on feeding the cancerous way in which our politics is conducted. That will be to the detriment of us all.

3.30 pm

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): This debate is important for all the reasons that have been mentioned: public frustration at those who can earn money and not pay tax while the rest of the people have to pay it; the stretching of public finances at a time of austerity and the need to ensure that legitimate taxes are paid; and, of course, the concern that the ability to evade taxes and to hide sources of income leads to all kinds of corruption, including, as we have found in Northern Ireland, the ability to finance terrorism.

Let me put it on the record that however much the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor beat their chests about the evasion of taxes, they showed friendship to and favoured the very people who used all kinds of fiscal fraud to finance murder in Northern Ireland for 30 years—and we have never heard an apology from them about it.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) said, we must approach this matter with a sense of maturity rather than a “politics of envy” approach. I know that some Opposition Members have denied it, but some contributions have demonstrated

such an approach. Equally, on the Government side, there must be a willingness to listen to the genuine concerns and deal with the issues raised.

I do not believe that we can deal with this matter simply by demanding that everybody produce and publish their tax returns. Someone who is going to evade tax is hardly going to put that down on their tax return in any case. Where does this stop? If the issue is all about how the creation of policy has been influenced, what about top civil servants, who are involved in policy making? What about the heads of many public sector organisations, who are also involved in it? What of the press? We cannot have the critics of what happens in this House avoiding the publication of their own tax returns. As I say, where does it stop?

In any case, the answer does not lie in publishing tax returns. I believe that three important points have been identified. I shall not go through all of them, but the first one is that we must know who is responsible for the income of a certain business or company and be able to trace it, because the issues of accessibility and transparency are important. How do we achieve that? I think that the Government have already gone some way along the road.

Strangely enough, Labour Members believe that we should use Orders in Council against independent territories—a form of colonialism that I would have thought they would not support. [Interruption.] Opposition Members may say that is nonsense, but either we regard these places as independent territories that make their own laws, and seek to co-operate with and persuade them to do the right thing, or we impose the laws on them, which as far as I am concerned is a form of colonialism. I do not think it would work. I think the Government are right to seek to persuade those territories to come along and see the implications of allowing people to hide their identities in some of the businesses based in them.

The second important point is about tax avoidance. Many Members have talked about it today, but millions of people in the United Kingdom engage in tax avoidance and think nothing of it, because it is within the law. When a tax code can run to 22,000-plus pages, with all the allowances and other provisions in it, of course people are going to find loopholes. Unfortunately, as the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) said, the people best able to do that are people who have huge resources at their disposal. Many taxpayers do not have such resources, so a simpler tax system would help. Adam Smith, whose words have been cited in the Chamber today, laid down the canons of taxation, which he said were fairness, simplicity and the ability to collect taxes economically. Those are some of the principles that we should keep in mind.

Thirdly, there is the issue of enforceability. I have reservations about the direction in which the Government are going. Of course we should find efficiencies in public services, but when I see how many tax offices are closing, especially in border towns in Northern Ireland, where hundreds of years’ worth of experience in dealing with some of the worst money launderers in the United Kingdom is being lost, I ask myself whether we are really serious about taking on the tax evaders. Even when we spot them, they are not always prosecuted. HSBC has been identified as one bank that enabled many people to evade taxes—I believe that there were

7,000, and that more than 1,100 were in the United Kingdom—but there has been only one prosecution so far. It is not just a case of having the resources to enforce. It is a case of making sure that when people are caught, examples are made of them and they are punished accordingly, so that the message that goes out is, “This will not be tolerated.”

I believe that if we do not work to achieve greater transparency, an efficient tax system that does not leave loopholes and a proper method of enforcement, what is happening now will go on and on.

3.36 pm

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): I want to take up the point made by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) about enforcement. He mentioned the closure of tax offices in Northern Ireland. I know that a tax office in my constituency is due to be closed in the next few years, which means the loss of work that it was doing on matters including the recovery of overseas taxes.

However, I do not want to join those who have used the debate to make points about the Government’s general tax policy or taxation record, because I think that the public would expect us to be debating the enormous implications of the Panama papers. I do not wish to conflate questions about the syndicated global grand larceny that is revealed in those papers with questions about personal taxation involving the Prime Minister or, indeed, anyone else. I would prefer us to concentrate—in this and other debates that will take place between now and the global anti-corruption summit that the Prime Minister will host—on the sort of issues that we would have been discussing anyway.

We have heard much from Conservative Members about the Government’s record of changing tax thresholds and about what is happening to the taxes of the wealthier people in the country, and we have heard the views of Opposition Members as well, but let us now address some of the global implications of the Panama papers. When we consider the larceny that is represented in those papers and the people who have avoided or evaded taxes, we should bear it in mind that this is not a victimless duplicity or deceit, because other people have been left to pay those taxes. Other firms are having to pay taxes in order to meet the needs of exchequers worldwide, not least those in developing countries. Other people are missing out on services or salaries, because the tax is not there to maintain services at the levels necessary to improve the development of infrastructure or to pay salaries. People are losing out. These are not the politics of envy, but the politics of reality and social justice. These are the politics that say that, in the 21st century, we should live in a world where we are all in it together. That is why fairness in taxation worldwide is so important.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is, as usual, making a powerful speech. Christian Aid noted recently that an oil company in Uganda had approached Mossack Fonseca in an attempt to avoid paying £400 million worth of taxes there. That is equivalent to the budget of the entire Ugandan healthcare service. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the avoidance of such taxes is not a victimless crime?

**Mark Durkan:** Absolutely. That example amplifies the point that I was making. I want to acknowledge the work of not just Christian Aid, but Oxfam, ActionAid, Global Witness and Transparency International. Those organisations have worked with many Members of Parliament for years to make us more aware of these issues. Not least, I want to acknowledge the work of the all-party parliamentary group on anti-corruption, including the contributions of the hon. Members for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) and for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills). The hon. Member for Amber Valley cannot be with us today, but he has taken a keen interest in many of the issues that have now surfaced in an even more dramatic form in the Panama papers.

It would have been interesting to hear from the Minister whether the Government were actually shocked by the Panama papers. We know about all the attention and fuss about the Prime Minister, but did the Government regard the other issues as par for the course? Did they know they were going on? Were they therefore informing their various measures against corruption, or did the revelations tell them that the issue was bigger than they were aware of? Given that Mossack Fonseca is not the biggest firm in Panama, what worries have they about what else is going on there?

We heard the Prime Minister say earlier, “The agencies that deal with this are independent and we cannot deal with them.” Someone somewhere should be asking them, “Is this what you knew? Has this shocked you? Are you doing anything more in response?” Journalists are being asked to provide the information. Is anyone else being pursued for the information? Is anyone having their door knocked or collar felt? It seems not. That seems odd.

As the Prime Minister is hosting a global anti-corruption summit, he should be showing himself to be much more active in response to the papers. Now that he has perhaps in his own mind dealt with the issues that arose about himself, he can address the wider issues. Perhaps if he had addressed the wider issues last week, people would have thought that that was misdirection and that he was trying to avoid the issue on his part. However, he needs to address those issues now if the summit is to be worth while.

It is particularly disappointing to hear the Prime Minister being the spin doctor for the Crown territories and their role. I cannot believe they are not a tax haven. He is trying to say that, because they have moved a bit following what he said in 2013 about what he was going to compel and ask them to do, that is enough. There has been progress. There are indications of possible progress, but he should not be lessening the pressure on the Crown dependencies in the lead-up to the summit. He should be ratcheting up the pressure on them and everyone else. He should be doing so by showing a stronger response here in relation to our own agencies.

In the debate, there has been much discussion by Members about the difference between avoidance and evasion. Let us be clear. A syndicated effort has gone into the artifice that is involved in some of these shells, shams, scams and schemes. We know that the architecture of avoidance is fitted with the engineering of evasion, so there is not that much of a difference. We need stronger global action.

That is why I again ask the Government to consider their attitude to some global measures. In the past, when they said they wanted to lead against corruption

[Mark Durkan]

and were putting taxation central stage at the UN summit and beyond, they also set their face against any notion of a financial transaction tax. If there were a financial transaction tax at a global level, it would at least ensure that there was more marking of what was going on in all these different schemes and moves, where companies appear to trade with shadow versions of themselves and shells are registered in different places. The very existence of a uniform global transaction tax would bring some tracking and tracing to some of those schemes and bring more transparency, which people say is needed.

The Panama papers represent discovering what has been done in terms of the recovery of tax. The Government seem to have a pretty pedestrian attitude to that at this stage. They seem to be more concerned about the media flap last week about the Prime Minister being embroiled in some of this. They think that that is over, but they seem to be taking a fairly pedestrian approach to an issue that is scandalising many still and is burdening people in poor countries.

3.43 pm

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the many organisations that have been involved in supporting the inquiry on the issue of the Panama papers. They include Oxfam, Tax Justice Network, Global Witness, Transparency International and Christian Aid. They have played an invaluable role. I also thank all Members for their contributions to the debate. They include the hon. Members for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), for Torbay (Kevin Foster), for South Suffolk (James Cartledge), for Newark (Robert Jenrick), for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) and for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), and my hon. Friends the Members for Blaydon (Mr Anderson), for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) and for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), all of whom have raised important issues.

We have heard about tax being not a donation but a legal requirement, and about the need to take the non-payment of tax incredibly seriously. We have also heard that the work of the Public Accounts Committee is vital in this area. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North said that this was a pivotal moment that the Government must not squander. We have also heard about the challenges relating to prosecutions owing to the complexity of the structures of multinational companies, and about the need to extend the law further to tackle the wider issues of economic crime.

This is a moment that we must seize. The public and the media have not always been engaged with this issue, but they can now see the scale of the injustice not only in the UK but across the world. The Panama papers have lifted the lid, and there is no going back. These revelations have provided concrete examples of what we have all suspected; they have exposed details of the worst excesses of our international financial system.

At the heart of the issue is the matter of public trust and confidence in the fairness of our tax system. People rightly say, "I pay my fair share towards the cost of vital public services. I can't dodge or negotiate with the tax authorities, so why should wealthy individuals and companies get away with not paying their fair share?"

Despite all the claims that we have heard from the Government, people do not think that they have done enough to tackle the problem, either here or in the overseas territories and Crown dependencies for which we have responsibility.

This is a global issue and it needs a global response. Today's debate reflects the widespread public view that individuals and companies should pay their fair share, and we are calling on the Government to implement Labour's tax transparency enforcement programme. Labour has a strong record on tax evasion and avoidance. The measures that we introduced while we were in power will still raise 10 times as much over the coming years as those introduced by the Tories in the last Parliament. That is the conclusion of analysis carried out by the *Financial Times*.

Over the past week, the Government have had the chance to step up and take a strong lead. It is disappointing that they have failed to do so. The Government's taskforce and other measures represent a missed opportunity to end the secrecy ahead of next month's anti-corruption summit. In 2013, the Prime Minister wrote to overseas territories and Crown dependencies calling for greater transparency and for fully resourced and properly managed centralised registries. He wrote again on this subject. We have had written questions and oral questions, but we can now see that it is not the Government's intention to push the issue of public registers further. Instead, the information that has been agreed on will be available only to UK law enforcement and tax authorities.

The beneficial ownership agreement with the Cayman Islands allows only designated Cayman Islands officials directly to obtain and provide to the UK details of beneficial ownership of companies incorporated in the Cayman Islands. Furthermore, the UK's Swiss tax agreement announced in 2011 has raised just a fraction of the promised £5.3 billion. So the Government are very good at spin, but their record does not stand up to scrutiny. What is particularly stark about the Panama revelations is that more than half the companies named in the papers were registered in UK-governed tax havens. That is something of which we should be ashamed. We believe that the UK should be leading the global campaign to fight against aggressive tax avoidance and evasion; instead, we are lagging behind.

There are a number of other vital issues. We have talked about the need for an independent inquiry. While there have been moves across the world, including an important meeting in Paris today organised by the Joint International Tax Shelter Information & Collaboration network, our officials have not yet managed to make it to Hitchin to undertake their own inquiries into the Panama papers.

The issue is effectively one of theft. Every year, about \$200 billion of untaxed income is taken out of poor countries by international corporations that are avoiding paying tax. Speed is another issue, as was highlighted by the chair of the JITSIC network, who emphasised today the need for immediate information exchange. Far from seeing the Government heed that call, they continue to slow down, not accelerate, their action to tackle tax avoidance.

We have a lot more to do. We need greater parliamentary scrutiny, a specialised tax enforcement unit, greater public sector transparency, including having companies that want to bid for public sector contracts make public

their beneficial owners. We need greater co-operation with our European partners, country-by-country reporting and protection for whistleblowers. The issue also highlights the importance of our membership of the European Union in tackling complex problems that do not stop at national borders. We have called on the Government to take much more action and fast. We have called for stricter minimum standards for Crown dependencies and overseas territories, but the lack of stronger international standards was cited by the Financial Secretary today as a reason for not pushing for public registers of beneficial owners.

Let me add one more point in conclusion. On Monday, the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) said that the Opposition should

“snap out of their synthetic indignation”

and that we risk having a House

“stuffed full of low achievers who hate enterprise”.—[*Official Report*, 11 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 34.]

Sadly, the Financial Secretary seemed to back him up. This is not about begrudging entrepreneurs and those who succeed in business their success; it is about basic fairness in our society. This is an issue on which the rich and poor who believe in fairness are united. When we shirk our responsibility to crack down on tax havens, we let down our country and our constituents. That is why I urge the House to join us in voting in support of Labour’s proposed measures today.

3.52 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin):** I am again delighted to be given the opportunity to outline the action that the Government are proud to have taken to tackle tax evasion, tax avoidance and aggressive tax planning. No Government have done more to ensure that people and companies pay the taxes they owe and to crack down on those who do not play by the rules. That is why, from day one, we have introduced measure after measure to close the tax loopholes we inherited, to increase the punishment for those who break the law, to drive forward tax transparency and ensure that the UK is at the forefront of new global standards, to ensure that international tax rules are fit for the 21st century, to reform the regimes in overseas territories and Crown dependencies, and to increase HMRC’s powers to collect the money that pays for the public services on which we all depend.

Yes, individuals and companies should pay their fair share of tax, which is exactly what this Government have been ensuring that they do. The activities in Panama are already the subject of intensive HMRC investigation. It is imperative that the leaked data are examined closely, which is why we are setting up and providing funding for an operationally independent, cross-agency taskforce to sift through the millions of pages of data. Where there is evidence of any wrongdoing, rapid action will be taken. The Government also attach great importance to giving HMRC the resources to protect our tax base, which is why at last year’s summer Budget we announced an extra £800 million to fund additional work to tackle evasion and non-compliance by 2020-21. That will enable HMRC to recover a cumulative £7.2 billion in tax over the next five years.

The Opposition motion talks about beneficial ownership. Thanks to this Government’s action, our register of company beneficial ownership will go live in June. We are

the first major country to have such a list in place, free for anyone to access. In addition, we are consulting on requiring foreign companies that own property or bid on public contracts in England to provide beneficial ownership information, too.

We heard from a range of speakers today. The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) has a new-found interest in a topic he asked no questions on during 13 years of Labour government, but he has managed over the past week to confirm his party as anti-aspiration and anti-wealth-creation, and as wanting to create an atmosphere of envy. We heard from the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), who was much more welcoming of the measures the Government have introduced, and he also attacked Labour’s lack of action in 13 years. We heard a very informed speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), a member of the Public Accounts Committee, who shared with us his expertise in that area. We also heard an interesting speech from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), who is chair and founder of the all-party group on anti-corruption. She will be aware of the proposed new offences that we are introducing in terms of prosecuting companies that fail to prevent evasion. She will want to participate in that consultation and in the process of legislation on that offence.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) brought in his expertise in business, highlighting the steps the Government have taken to help low earners. The hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) used some fairly dodgy statistics, but I am pleased to confirm that the amount of £1.8 billion has been made available for compliance and enforcement, which is an increase in resources, over the last two Parliaments. She raised questions about trusts, asking whether the arrangements relating to the beneficial ownership of companies should be extended to trusts. There are many legitimate reasons for creating a trust and the vast majority of trusts across the UK are used for legitimate purposes. Setting up a blanket requirement would distract action from the areas of most concern, such as shell companies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) made an interesting speech, in which he recommended abolishing corporation tax completely. The Government are not ready to do that at this point in time. The hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) made an angry speech that included rather a lot of personal attacks on individual Conservative politicians. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) made an excellent speech highlighting the Labour party’s politics of envy and our steps to make our income tax system even more progressive.

The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) spoke up for the low-paid, but I detected a strong streak of the politics of envy for anyone else in his speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) made a good speech about the credible action against corruption and criminality that this Government have taken. He gave an excellent and incisive summary of what we have done, drawing on his knowledge of the art world. We heard an interesting speech from the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), and I can confirm that HMRC does work closely with Interpol and is indeed finalising the list for the anti-corruption

[Harriett Baldwin]

summit as we speak. We heard helpful contributions from Members from Northern Ireland, who welcomed some of the steps the Government have taken.

In conclusion, this country is leading the way on tackling tax evasion and tax avoidance, bringing in billions from offshore tax evaders since 2010 through the actions we have taken. We have made more than 40 changes to tax law in the last Parliament alone, and in this Parliament more than 25 have already been announced for legislation.

Although Labour has suddenly decided to give lectures on tax, I remind the House that when we came into office there were foreign nationals not paying capital gains tax when selling UK property, private equity managers paying lower rates of tax than their cleaners, and rich homebuyers getting away without paying stamp duty by owning homes through companies. We have taken action to fix that. We have increased the amount paid in income tax by the top 1% from £31 billion 10 years ago to £47 billion now. We have made our taxes more internationally competitive. We have cut income tax for tens of millions of hard-working people, rewarded aspiration and made the tax system better, fairer and more efficient. That is our record. We are proud of it, and I urge the House to vote against today's Opposition motion.

*The House divided: Ayes 266, Noes 300.*

**Division No. 235]**

**[4 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Abrahams, Debbie	Champion, Sarah
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Cherry, Joanna
Alexander, Heidi	Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Ali, Rushanara	Coaker, Vernon
Allen, Mr Graham	Coffey, Ann
Anderson, Mr David	Cooper, Julie
Arkless, Richard	Cooper, Rosie
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cooper, rh Yvette
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Barron, rh Kevin	Cowan, Ronnie
Benn, rh Hilary	Cox, Jo
Berger, Luciana	Coyle, Neil
Blackford, Ian	Crausby, Mr David
Blackman, Kirsty	Crawley, Angela
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Creasy, Stella
Blenkinsop, Tom	Cruddas, Jon
Blomfield, Paul	Cryer, John
Boswell, Philip	Cummins, Judith
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cunningham, Alex
Brake, rh Tom	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Brennan, Kevin	Dakin, Nic
Brown, Alan	Danczuk, Simon
Brown, Lyn	David, Wayne
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Davies, Geraint
Bryant, Chris	Day, Martyn
Buck, Ms Karen	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Burden, Richard	Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Burton, Richard	Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Burnham, rh Andy	Doughty, Stephen
Butler, Dawn	Dowd, Jim
Byrne, rh Liam	Dowd, Peter
Cadbury, Ruth	Dromey, Jack
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Dugher, Michael
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Durkan, Mark
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Eagle, Ms Angela

Eagle, Maria	Lynch, Holly
Edwards, Jonathan	MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Efford, Clive	Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Elliott, Julie	Madders, Justin
Elliott, Tom	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Esterson, Bill	Mahmood, Shabana
Farrelly, Paul	Malhotra, Seema
Farron, Tim	Mann, John
Fellows, Marion	Marris, Rob
Ferrier, Margaret	Marsden, Mr Gordon
Field, rh Frank	Maskell, Rachael
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Matheson, Christian
Fleelo, Robert	McCabe, Steve
Fletcher, Colleen	McCaig, Callum
Flint, rh Caroline	McCarthy, Kerry
Flynn, Paul	McDonagh, Siobhain
Foxcroft, Vicky	McDonald, Andy
Gapes, Mike	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Gethins, Stephen	McDonald, Stuart C.
Gibson, Patricia	McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
Glass, Pat	McDonnell, John
Glindon, Mary	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Goodman, Helen	McGarry, Natalie
Grady, Patrick	McGinn, Conor
Grant, Peter	McGovern, Alison
Gray, Neil	McInnes, Liz
Green, Kate	McKinnell, Catherine
Greenwood, Lilian	McLaughlin, Anne
Greenwood, Margaret	McMahon, Jim
Griffith, Nia	Meale, Sir Alan
Gwynne, Andrew	Mearns, Ian
Hamilton, Fabian	Miliband, rh Edward
Hanson, rh Mr David	Monaghan, Dr Paul
Harris, Carolyn	Morden, Jessica
Hayes, Helen	Morris, Graham M.
Hendry, Drew	Mulholland, Greg
Hermon, Lady	Mullin, Roger
Hillier, Meg	Nandy, Lisa
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Newlands, Gavin
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Nicolson, John
Hoey, Kate	O'Hara, Brendan
Hollern, Kate	Onn, Melanie
Hopkins, Kelvin	Onwurah, Chi
Hosie, Stewart	Osamor, Kate
Howarth, rh Mr George	Oswald, Kirsten
Hunt, Tristram	Owen, Albert
Huq, Dr Rupa	Paterson, Steven
Jarvis, Dan	Pearce, Teresa
Johnson, rh Alan	Pennycook, Matthew
Johnson, Diana	Perkins, Toby
Jones, Gerald	Phillips, Jess
Jones, Graham	Pound, Stephen
Jones, Helen	Powell, Lucy
Jones, Susan Elan	Pugh, John
Kane, Mike	Qureshi, Yasmin
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald	Reed, Mr Steve
Kendall, Liz	Rees, Christina
Kerevan, George	Reeves, Rachel
Kerr, Calum	Reynolds, Jonathan
Kinahan, Danny	Rimmer, Marie
Kinnock, Stephen	Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Kyle, Peter	Robertson, rh Angus
Lamb, rh Norman	Robinson, Gavin
Lammy, rh Mr David	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Lavery, Ian	Rotheram, Steve
Law, Chris	Ryan, rh Joan
Leslie, Chris	Salmond, rh Alex
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Saville Roberts, Liz
Lewis, Clive	Shah, Naz
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Shannon, Jim
Lucas, Caroline	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Lucas, Ian C.	Sheerman, Mr Barry

Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Spellar, rh Mr John  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Michelle  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon

Turley, Anna  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 Weir, Mike  
 West, Catherine  
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Wilson, Corri  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wilson, Sammy  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

#### Tellers for the Ayes:

Sue Hayman and  
 Jeff Smith

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Mr Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair

Cairns, rh Alun  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colville, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Davies, Byron  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Elliott, Tom  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George

Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Gale, Sir Roger  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Gauke, Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matthew  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Boris  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew

Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kinahan, Danny  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Lewis, Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Pery, Claire  
 Phillips, Stephen  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Daniel  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy

Quince, Will  
 Raab, Mr Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward

Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
 Vaizey, Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watkinson, Dame Angela  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Guy Opperman and**  
**Jackie Doyle-Price**

*Question accordingly negated.*

## Schools White Paper

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. It may assist the House if I explain that, as this is not an allotted Opposition day—in other words, it is not one of the 20 Opposition days required under Standing Orders—the usual procedure governing the handling of amendments does not apply. After the Opposition spokesman has spoken and moved the Opposition motion, the Minister will be called to move the Government amendment. The debate will then take place on the question that the amendment be made. At the end of the debate, the question on the Government amendment will be put, followed by the question that the main motion, amended or not as may be the case, be agreed to.

4.16 pm

**Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op):** I beg to move,

That this House believes that every child deserves an excellent education; notes that the Government is proposing to force all primary and secondary schools in England to become academies as part of multi-academy trusts or chains by 2022 at the latest; further notes that the vast majority of schools affected by this policy will be primary schools, over 80 per cent of which are already rated good and outstanding; notes that there are outstanding academies and excellent community schools but also poor examples of both types of such school; further notes the Fourth Report from the Education Committee, Academies and free schools, Session 2014-15, HC 258, which highlights that there is no evidence that academisation in and of itself leads to school improvement; notes that the Schools White Paper proposes the removal of parent governors from school governing bodies which will reduce the genuine involvement of parents and communities in local schools; and calls on the Government to put these proposals on hold as there is insufficient evidence that they will raise standards.

I am pleased that we have secured this debate following the Government's rushed publication of their schools White Paper, which has caused much concern among parents, communities, heads, teachers and others. The main and most controversial proposal is to force all schools to become academies and the vast majority into multi-academy trusts or chains by 2022. That is the proposal on which we have decided to focus this debate, because we believe that the plans are deeply flawed, are not supported by evidence, have already caused huge disruption in schools, and notably, seem to have very few supporters.

There is a growing alliance of those with concerns, including Conservative Members and local government leaders, as well as leading headteacher unions such as the National Association of Head Teachers and the Association of School and College Leaders. It is my intention that this debate be used as an opportunity to air such concerns, and I hope that the Secretary of State will listen carefully, put the plans on hold, and not plough on regardless.

There are elements of the White Paper that we can support, such as the independent college of teaching, but we cannot support the main thrust of forced, wholesale academisation.

The Government's plan has been met with such concern, even by the very school leaders they claim to be supporting, because it is a bad policy with no evidence base. It is yet

another policy from this Government that is obsessed with school structures instead of standards. What is more, given the very real pressures faced by schools today—including huge teacher shortages, real-terms cuts to school budgets for the first time in 20 years and major overhauls to curriculums, assessments and exams—the idea that heads should spend time, money and energy on a £1.3 billion top-down reorganisation of our schools system is, at best, a distraction and, at worst, will have a very damaging impact on school standards.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I declare an interest as a governor of Denton West End primary academy in my constituency. The point is that that school chose to become an academy because parents and teachers decided that that was the best model for school improvement. Should not we also respect the parents and teachers at those schools that wish to remain under local authority control?

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, which I will come on to make myself shortly.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the proposal could lead to more school closures in the public sector? More importantly, we might face difficulties recruiting teachers. The £1.9 billion could have been better spent on public services rather than on an ideological argument.

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend echoes the concerns raised by the NAHT union in a memo it sent this morning to all MPs.

The Tory obsession with school structures has completely missed the point. Just as there are some excellent academies, there are some excellent community schools. There are also some poor academies and some poor community schools. No type of school has a monopoly on excellence. We need to build an education system that provides an excellent education for all children, rather than pitting one type of school against another. Nearly a month has passed since the Chancellor made the announcement, but we have yet to hear any answers to the question “Why?” When schools that want to become academies can already do so, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) has said, and when schools that the Government deem to be failing or coasting can already be put into an academy chain, why force all others? This is not about school improvement, nor is it about autonomy and freedoms. The multi-academy trust model is in its infancy, and real questions are emerging about accountability, probity, capacity and, for some, standards.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Lucy Powell:** I will make some progress, because a lot of people want to speak. I will take interventions shortly.

Let us look at each of the Government’s arguments in turn. First, the Government say that this is about school improvement. Let us look at the evidence. The vast majority of schools that will be affected by the policy will be primary schools, of which more than 17% are already academies. Of those that are not, more than

80% are already rated good or outstanding. In secondary, where more than two thirds of schools are already academies, there are more failing academies than non-academies. In places such as Doncaster, Bexley and north-east Lincolnshire, where school improvement remains a real concern, all the secondary schools are already academies.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Would she care to reflect on performance in Greenwich, which has become one of the highest-performing education authorities in the country without the enforced academisation of a single primary school, and in which only three secondary schools have become academies? That performance has been achieved without enforced academisation. Parents in our borough are concerned about why they have been removed from the process and will not be consulted about changes to their schools.

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

**Mr Geoffrey Robinson** (Coventry North West) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that we have an absurd situation in Coventry North West? The Secretary of State refused to meet me about this, but she is aware of it. After having been encouraged to become an academy, Woodlands underwent forced academisation a couple of years ago. Woodlands Academy is not doing well, but instead of putting in an intervention team, as the Prime Minister indicated at Question Time, the academy is being closed and another one is being started a mile up the road. What a waste of resources.

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point.

Only today, Ofsted has reported that the performance of secondary schools in Reading is “not strong”. Eight out of 10 secondary schools in Reading are already academies and are directly accountable to the Secretary of State. Why has she failed to improve those academies, and what is the Government’s school improvement strategy for that and other areas?

**Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Lucy Powell:** I will take some interventions later, but I am going to make some progress.

The Government claim that there are more children today in good or outstanding schools than there were in 2010, as proof that academisation leads to school improvement. However, the Secretary of State knows that, as ever, she is being selective with her figures. The truth is that the vast majority of those new good and outstanding places are in primary schools, where academisation is limited. Moreover, according to Ofsted, the number of pupils in inadequate secondary schools has risen by a staggering 60% over the last four years where academisation has taken hold significantly. Not for the first time, the Government’s selective use of statistics and their dubious link between cause and effect do not withstand any scrutiny. Perhaps that is why the Conservative majority Select Committee on Education recently concluded, after an extensive inquiry:

“Current evidence does not allow us to draw conclusions on whether academies in themselves are a positive force for change”

[Lucy Powell]

and:

“There is...no convincing evidence of the impact of academy status on attainment”.

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I declare an interest as the chairman of governors of Goole Academy, an academy school that is doing very well. In north Lincolnshire, we have had a big academisation programme, and we have gone from having 38% of kids in good and outstanding schools to having 92% of children in such schools. Although I may agree with some of the points that the hon. Lady has made, will she confirm that the Labour party’s position is to support academies? Her speech so far has seemed very anti-academies, and that concerns me as a governor of one.

**Lucy Powell:** Not at all. As I made clear in my opening remarks, there are some excellent academies and other types of schools. Academisation can be an ingredient of a wider school improvement programme, but the overall evidence is underwhelming at best.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Lucy Powell:** I am going to make some progress.

Although the Sutton Trust found excellence in a small number of academy chains, it found that the majority were underperforming. Not only is the forced academisation programme evidently not about school improvement, but the Government’s drive on it may greatly diminish what capacity there is in the system for school improvement. The regional schools commissioners, their officials, the energies of school leaders and local authorities will now, as we are already seeing, shift almost entirely away from schools that need improvement towards creating trusts and changing the legal status of a huge number of schools, most of which are already performing well. Indeed, the national schools commissioner and the Department for Education have not even acquired the powers they sought from Parliament in the Education and Adoption Act 2016—they will get them on Monday—to put more schools they deem to be coasting into academy chains. Was that piece of legislation therefore a complete waste of time?

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is talking about coasting schools. In the NHS, which had a huge reorganisation that nobody voted for, performance absolutely went down while people had to deal with that big reorganisation. Is she worried, as I am, that this is heading in the same direction? If there is a big reorganisation that nobody has voted for, performance in our schools and the achievement of our children will fall away.

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The Government, as they have no other ideas, seem to enjoy such reorganisations.

I will shortly return to some of the very real concerns about the performance of academy chains, but I first want to look at another of the Government’s arguments for forced academisation, which is that it is about autonomy and freedoms. This Government say they are for choice in education. Choice? What choice is there in

a one-size-fits-all policy? What is autonomous about forcing a high-performing school into an academy chain? Will the Secretary of State promise that every outstanding school leader who wants their school to remain as it is can do so? No, she cannot. Where is the autonomy for the small village school, which the White Paper makes clear cannot be a stand-alone academy? I see some nods from Conservative Members to these points. Perhaps this is why even one of the Secretary of State’s main allies, Toby Young, has described this policy as Stalinist. The curriculum and other freedoms described by the Government could easily be given to all schools without the need for a change to legal status.

**Mr Gavin Shaker** (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is talking about autonomy and democratic control. We have a model of that in the form of co-operative schools, in which parents, pupils and school leaders all work together. Why does she think they should be forced to academise?

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend makes another excellent point.

On curriculum freedoms, the Secretary of State and I both know that the autonomy the Tories say they are providing just does not exist. During the past five years, parts of the curriculum have been personally drafted by the Education Secretary and then circulated for sign-off among Cabinet Ministers. This sort of ministerial diktat on the curriculum puts schools into a straitjacket. In fact, what we are actually seeing with academisation is a further narrowing of curriculums as schools aim to improve their Ofsted judgments on an increasingly narrow set of measurements.

While the academy programme was originally about bringing new partners and innovation into the system, a wholesale academisation programme will undoubtedly create an increasingly sclerotic and one-dimensional system. It is no wonder that the chief executive of England’s largest academy chain, Academy Enterprise Trust, recently admitted that there is in fact less autonomy for schools in multi-academy trusts than there is for local authority schools.

**Steve Brine:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Lucy Powell:** If the hon. Gentleman wants to comment on that, I am more than happy for him to do so.

**Steve Brine:** No, my intervention is not about that, but I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. She is being very generous with her—or probably our—time. She asks us to support the motion on the Order Paper, which is in her name and that of the Leader of the Opposition. This point came up at Prime Minister’s Question Time earlier. She says that the White Paper proposes the removal of parent governors from school governing bodies, but paragraph 3.31 on page 51 of the White Paper makes it very clear that it will not do so. Clearly, she did not have an opportunity to clarify that during PMQs, but will she now take the opportunity to strike that phrase from the motion?

**Lucy Powell:** I am happy to clarify that the Government propose to remove the requirement for parent governors. If the hon. Gentleman wants to have a semantic debate

about that, it is in the White Paper, on the page to which he referred. The Secretary of State will have the opportunity to talk about that in a moment.

That brings me to the evidence for and the performance of multi-academy trusts—MATs—or chains as they have become better known. It may come as a surprise to many Conservative Members that the Government's free school and academy agenda has quietly but significantly shifted in policy and practice from stand-alone academies to MAT or chain models. That shift was made clear in the White Paper, in which the policy preference is emphatically for schools to become part of chains. Indeed, Department for Education guidance issued yesterday said:

“We expect that most schools will form or join multi-academy trusts as they become academies.”

There is evidence that schools do better working collaboratively with clusters of schools, especially where they are clustered geographically, as many do in local authority areas.

However, the evidence for the performance of chains so far is mixed. There are some notably good academy chains, but there are many more that are not good. Of the 850 current MATs or chains, only 20 have been assessed, and just three have proved more effective than non-academies. The chief inspector of schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw, wrote to the Secretary of State only a week before the Budget highlighting “serious weaknesses” in academy chains. He went on to say that, in many cases, “academy chains are worse than the worst performing local authorities they seek to replace”.

To continue with forced academisation of all schools after such a damning letter is frankly irresponsible.

There are major questions for the Government on capacity too. Academy chains are in their infancy and clearly require a closer look, yet the Government want them to take on thousands more schools. Maybe that is why the Secretary of State cannot rule out poorly performing chains being given otherwise good schools under the proposals. One of the main reasons why the track record of many chains is not good is the dearth of any real oversight or accountability.

I share the concerns expressed by many Members of all parties, including my near neighbour, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady), who said that we are in danger of creating distant, unaccountable bureaucracies for schools. That the Department for Education, via its small group of schools commissioners, can provide robust oversight and accountability of all schools in the country, is frankly for the birds. It is an impossible job, and it is also not desirable.

The Secretary of State seems hell-bent on cutting out communities, and cutting out parents from having any say over how their child's school is run. First, let us take the Tories' plan to scrap the requirement for parents to sit on governing bodies. Abolishing parent governors and removing any role for parents in choosing whether their child's school becomes an academy and what type of academy it becomes has unsurprisingly been met with a huge outcry. I understand that the Secretary of State wants to take this opportunity to clarify that parents can still be governors. However, as she well knows, under her plans, there will no longer be a requirement for governing bodies to have them. I do not think that that is the kind of clarification parents are

looking for. Perhaps she would like to take the opportunity to go further. In any case, she and I both know that in a world of academy chains, the role of the individual school governing body is greatly diminished and key decisions are taken by the two new levels: the board of trustees and the member board above that; bodies that are all too often appointed by the head or the chief executive whom they are supposed to be holding to account.

If we want to avoid more scandals such as Perry Beaches, Kings Science Academy and E-ACT, to name just a few, and if schools are genuinely to be held to account, we need a much more robust governance regime than remote trustee boards appointed by their executive, held to account only by a regional schools commissioner, who is responsible for overseeing thousands of schools.

There are also very real issues on the ground about accountability and responsibility for excluded children, placing children with SEN and admission policies. They all have very real problems under the fragmented schools system. Such a system of oversight also needs to have recourse to the needs of the local community. We cannot have a situation where the needs of the local area are not considered, such as the case of Knowsley, where the last A-level provision across the entire borough is about to be lost, based on a decision taken by one school. There has to be a better-joined up approach to school improvement and local oversight, involving school leaders and councils as well as parents.

The Government claim to lead the devolution revolution, so their centralisation of schools is both wrong-headed and contradictory. In places like my own, Greater Manchester, the Chancellor talks of releasing the combined authority and elected Mayor to create a northern powerhouse. That the skills and education of the next generation are being taken away at the same time shows what a sham that project is.

That point leads me to one last argument the Government make, which is that it would be simpler to have one funding system. That argument is nonsense and certainly does not support the £1.3 billion reorganisation of the schools system that is being proposed. It is also disingenuous of the Government to link the proposals to the fair funding consultation. There is broad support for a fairer funding model, as long as deprived areas and areas that require improvement do not lose out. Forcing all schools to become academies does not need to be linked to that.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): The shadow Secretary of State was absolutely right to say at the start of her remarks that this should not be a debate about quality. Does she agree that if we reach a certain tipping point in the number of schools recognising the direction of travel and academising, it is sensible to have a discussion about what, if any, future role there should be for LEAs as we understand them, and what the future of education planning will be for the next 20 or 30 years? It seems to me that we have arrived at that tipping point and so it is right to have that debate.

**Lucy Powell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, but disagree that we have reached that tipping point. We certainly have not done so with primary schools, as only 17% are academies. A longer-term look would be welcome, but an arbitrary timetable set by the

[Lucy Powell]

Chancellor and Prime Minister as part of their legacy is a totally false track. For decades, we have had a multifaceted funding arrangement for our schools. There is no real reason why that cannot continue.

The proposal to force all schools to become academies and part of academy chains is a costly reorganisation that schools do not want or need. Heads are dealing with some very real and big challenges, such as teacher shortages, significant real-terms cuts to their budgets, flux and chaos in assessment, and insufficient school places. Asking them to take time out to change their legal status and to become an academy against their wishes is wrong, and will impact on standards.

This agenda is not about school improvement, as most of the schools affected are already good or outstanding. It is not about more autonomy or more choice, as a one-size-fits-all approach is being forced on all schools. It is not about parents, as they are being cut out of the picture. It is not about devolution, but centralisation. There are real and serious concerns about capacity, oversight and accountability under the Secretary of State's plans.

There is a growing alliance of heads, governors, parents, teachers, politicians from all parties and many of the original advocates of the academy programme against forced wholesale academisation. Yet this Government, who used to say they were all for choice, profess to be about standards and claim they are on the side of parents and schools, seem to be ploughing on regardless, without a single coherent argument or a shred of credible evidence to support them. They still have time to listen, pause and reflect, and today's debate gives them a chance to do just that. I commend the motion to the House.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Before I call the Secretary of State to move the amendment, I will let Members know that I will be imposing a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

4.38 pm

**The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan):** I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "education;" to the end of the Question and add:

"welcomes the transformation in England's schools since 2010 where 1.4 million more children are now taught in good or outstanding schools; notes that the academies programme has been at the heart of that transformation because it trusts school leaders to run schools and empowers them with the freedom to innovate and drive up standards; further notes that there remain too many areas of underperformance and that more needs to be done to ensure that standards in England match those of its best international competitors; and therefore welcomes the Government's proposals in its White Paper to further improve teacher quality, ensure funding is fairly distributed, tackle areas of chronic educational failure and devolve more power to heads and school leaders to ensure both they and parents have more of a voice in the running of their schools; and welcomes the commitment to achieve educational excellence everywhere."

Education is at the heart of this Government's mission, because we all know that a good education transforms a child's future. Our White Paper sets out our ambition to deliver real social justice by ensuring that every child gets an excellent education.

The Opposition motion is a deliberate misinterpretation of our proposals to transform England's schools. As we have already heard, it contains at least two errors, including, as pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), one about parent governors. I am afraid that contributions from the shadow Secretary of State are starting to follow an all too familiar pattern of scaremongering and ignoring the achievements of both the teaching profession and our education system. I note that since her appointment, she has yet to propose a single positive idea, and we heard no more today about how we can raise standards across England's schools.

**Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) on initiating this debate. Will the Secretary of State address what for Brentford and Isleworth in the Borough of Hounslow are the three most pressing problems: first, the recruitment and retention of good quality teachers, particularly in EBacc subjects; secondly, the desperate need to build sufficient secondary school places in time for 2017—unfortunately the Education Funding Agency is the cause of that delay; and finally, the need to ensure that our children have the skills for the local employment market when they leave? Mr Deputy Speaker—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. We have got the message.

**Nicky Morgan:** I am delighted that the hon. Lady is engaging in issues that are of real concern to her constituents, and she is right to do so. I do not know whether she has had a chance to read all the White Paper, but it contains many of the answers, and I will come to on to talk about teacher recruitment and career development in a moment. This Government have so far spent £23 billion on building new accommodation for school places, and we have created 600,000 more school places since 2010.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** Let me finish answering the hon. Lady's point. I hope that she has engaged with the new enterprise adviser from the Careers and Enterprise Company in her area, which is doing exactly what she said—engaging many more young people in those careers.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** Let me make some progress and then I will take more interventions. Given the drafting of the motion, I must ask how much of the White Paper the shadow Education Secretary has read. Only one of its eight chapters is concerned with every school becoming an academy. It is not a schools White Paper, as the motion states; it is an education White Paper, and there is a critical difference.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** I will take an intervention in a moment.

I have not heard anything from the hon. Lady about the other seven chapters of the White Paper, including our vision to spread educational excellence everywhere,

for the profession to take responsibility for teacher accreditation, and to set high expectations for every child with a world-leading curriculum.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am a supporter of the academies programme, and the experiences of my constituents have been largely—although not exclusively—positive. I am disappointed to see the Opposition go cold on one of their proudest innovations. As a Conservative, I also believe in choice, so will the Secretary of State outline the downside of allowing schools to migrate organically to academy status if they choose, rather than imposing a compulsory and arbitrary timeline on them?

**Nicky Morgan:** I will come on to that. My hon. Friend is right, and it is perfectly fair to ask that question. We are allowing six years for the change to be made. As a former Education Minister, he will recognise the benefits of allowing front-line professionals—heads, teachers and governors—to run their schools.

**Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): Like most Conservative Members, I am a great supporter of academies and they have been a great success in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State say something about the capacity of small primary schools, particularly in rural areas, to make that change?

**Nicky Morgan:** I will, and I recognise that there will be challenges for smaller schools in taking on the responsibilities of becoming stand-alone academy trusts, and we look forward to working with Members across the House on that.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): Point 4.49 on page 65 of the White Paper states:

“The role of parents is crucial...Our approach puts parents and children first, not through symbolic representation on a governing board, but through engagement with schools.”

What conclusion are parents meant to come to when the experience of parent governors over three decades is wrapped up in the world “symbolic”?

**Nicky Morgan:** The conclusion they will draw, one which I will come on to, is that we want parents to be engaged not just via governing bodies but through parent councils, through the ability to make complaints and be involved in their child’s education, and through being aware of how their child is taught. There are many more ways, in addition to being parent governors, that they can be engaged.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** I am going to make some progress.

The truth, as the Government amendment makes clear, is that there is no silver bullet to improve standards in education. Instead, concerted effort and innovation are required on every front. That is what we have done over the past six years. Since 2010, we have seen 1.4 million more pupils in good and outstanding schools as a result of our reforms, translated into reality by an outstanding teaching profession, to raise standards, restore rigour and free heads and teachers to run their schools in a way that works for their students. For all

that we have unlocked excellence, we do not, as I have said many times before, yet have that excellence everywhere. For me, that “everywhere” is non-negotiable.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that schools will lose 8% of their funding in real terms over the next five years. What does the Secretary of State say to parents about the unfunded £1 billion cost of enforced academisation when schools are already facing that financial pressure?

**Nicky Morgan:** Opposition Members need to refresh their maths, because that calculation is completely wrong.

Our White Paper outlines exactly how we are going to ensure excellence everywhere. It makes it clear that while we have the most qualified teaching workforce in our country’s history, we can do more to ensure that every teacher has the support to do the job as well as they can.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend think it is extraordinary that, despite the volume of noise from the Opposition Benches, not one Labour Member has had the courage to stand up and say there is something fundamentally and totally inaccurate in the Opposition motion? It claims that the Secretary of State and our Government are trying to ban the role of parents on school governing bodies. Every single secondary school in my constituency is an academy and they all have parents on governing bodies.

**Nicky Morgan:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

**Lucy Powell** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** Let me answer the point and then I will invite the shadow Education Secretary to clarify what the Opposition motion actually says. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are two errors in the motion. The first is that it says we are abolishing the role of parent governors. We absolutely are not. The second is that we will force all schools to join multi-academy trusts. That is also not the case.

**Lucy Powell:** This may be a semantic argument, but does it not say in the White Paper that the Secretary of State is removing the requirement for parent governors? Is the Secretary of State removing the requirement—yes or no?

**Nicky Morgan:** Let me just remind the hon. Lady what her motion says. [*Interruption.*] Opposition Members do not want to listen.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** If we are going to ask a question, let us hear the answer.

**Nicky Morgan:** I do not think they want to hear the answer, because they do not want to hear the clarification. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I want to hear your answer, Secretary of State. Come on!

**Nicky Morgan:** I am very grateful to you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The shadow Education Secretary's motion states:

"the Schools White Paper"—

it is not a schools White Paper—

"proposes the removal of parent governors from school governing bodies".

It does not. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Lady, in drafting her motion, cannot put all the words from the White Paper in the motion, then frankly she needs to go back and do her English lessons.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** I am going to make some progress.

It is important that hon. Members hear what is in the White Paper. We are outlining reforms of how teachers are trained and accredited, which, alongside the establishment of a new college of teaching and a new framework for professional development, will help to put teaching where it belongs—on a par with other professions such as medicine and law. It outlines our commitment—*[Interruption.]* I am not going to give way, because I am going to set out what is in the White Paper for the benefit of hon. Members, some of whom on the Opposition Front Bench clearly have not read it. It outlines our commitment—*[Interruption.]* I have just said I am not going to give way. It outlines our commitment—*[Interruption.]* Honestly, Mr Deputy Speaker, I think they are deaf. The White Paper outlines our commitment to make sure that school funding is fairly distributed—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I want to hear both sides. If we cannot hear it, what about the people who are listening out there? Let us try to keep it in order, because this is a very important debate that affects all our constituents, whichever side of the argument we are on.

**Nicky Morgan:** As I was saying, the White Paper outlines reforms of how teachers are trained and it outlines our commitment to make sure that school funding is fairly distributed across the counties, ending the gross inequities and distortions, so that heads and parents can have the confidence that the same child with the same characteristics and the same costs receives the same level of funding. It reaffirms our commitment to ensure that every single child reaches their potential, from stretching the most able to supporting those who, for whatever reason, have fallen out of mainstream education. It proposes a bold new strategy, which I think all Members should welcome, to tackle areas of chronic underperformance through new educational achievement areas that will target school-led improvement support from national leaders of education, teaching schools and the national teaching service in the most needed areas.

**Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab):** As the Secretary of State is aware, the last sixth-form A-level provision in Knowsley in Garston and Halewood has now been withdrawn by the academy concerned, so she will appreciate that there is concern about that issue in Knowsley. Will she explain why she has refused to meet my hon. Friends the Members for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) and for St Helens South and Whiston (Marie Rimmer) and me to discuss our concerns?

**Nicky Morgan:** Of course we will meet them, and the Schools Minister has agreed to do so.

The hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) has said previously that she was proud of Labour's academy programme, which transformed a small number of failing schools. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, I intended to give way to my hon. Friend.

**Steve Brine:** That is very kind of my right hon. Friend; she is being very generous. She knows that as an MP from Hampshire, where 85% of our schools are good or outstanding. I have many questions about this policy, but if I were to sum up the concerns expressed to me by local teachers, it would be with the word "confusion". They are confused about why something that is so obviously not broken needs fixing. My concern, which I am sure my right hon. Friend can dispel, is that we must not allow the bad to become the enemy of the good. What would her advice be to Hampshire, where the numbers converting to academy status are relatively low because schools are getting a good service from the existing local education authority? Is there any reason why Hampshire should not create, for instance, a new independent organisation, through which services that our schools—including those that are already academies—so value can continue to be delivered?

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank my hon. Friend very much. He is absolutely right to say that there is a new role for local authorities, for talented individuals in local authorities to set up their own multi-academy trusts to provide services to schools and to build on the excellence that we already have. I shall set out why we think that schools run by front-line professionals is the best and most sustainable model for raising standards for all pupils.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** I am going to make some progress. Many Members wish to speak, and because of the noise I have not been able to set out exactly what is in the White Paper.

Why not spread the transformation that we have seen via academies across the country to enable excellence for every child? One of the first things we did in the last Government was to turbo-charge Lord Adonis's academy programme. We saw how autonomy gave strong sponsors the freedom and flexibility they needed to turn around failing schools, and we saw no reason why "good" and "outstanding" school leaders should not have that freedom as well. The White Paper proposes the next phase in our reforms to empower heads and teachers, to make sure that schools are run by those who know them best, to enable greater collaboration and co-operation, and to give parents and local communities more of a say in the running of their schools by moving over the next six years towards a system where every school is an academy.

**Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con):** There is no doubt that we all want the best for our children. In Dorset, we have both types of school: state-run schools and academies. May I suggest caution as we proceed because a "one cap fits all" approach always makes me nervous? A natural progression from one to another, as suggested by some of my colleagues, is probably the best way to go, rather than imposition.

**Nicky Morgan:** I entirely understand what my hon. Friend says, based on his experiences. I have had the benefit of visiting schools across the country, so I know that despite schools becoming academies, there are lots of different models, with different sizes of schools and different opportunities for heads, leaders and teachers. There are big schools, small schools, schools in collaboration, schools working formally together, special schools, and schools with alternative provision. We have an amazing education system. The collaboration that is going on should be welcomed and celebrated.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I want to join many Labour Members in talking positively about the transformative effects that academies have had in our constituencies. I am particularly proud of Colne Valley High School, Marsden Junior School and Moor End Academy. However, I am a Conservative because I believe in choice. Does the Secretary of State agree that we should put our trust in parents and governing bodies, and will she please look again at the word “forced”?

**Nicky Morgan:** I, too, trust parents and governing bodies. I note that there is an appetite across the country for parents, governing bodies, heads and teachers to take more responsibility for their schools, and, rather than being told what to do by local authorities, to make the real choices that are best for their schools, their pupils and their communities. I look forward to engaging in that debate with my hon. Friend.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con) *rose—*

**Nicky Morgan:** I will take one last intervention.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** I think the Secretary of State will confirm that we are talking about a White Paper. I know that she will listen carefully to colleagues, but will she also work with Conservative-controlled county councils such as Lincolnshire, which have a wonderful record of keeping small primary schools open? The possibility of their closing is what we are fearful of. May we, at the end of this process, have a compromise whereby county councils will not necessarily be forced to give up control of their small primary schools? It is essential for them to be kept open in rural areas. I know that the Secretary of State wants to proceed in a spirit of compromise, and does not wish to force anything on anyone.

**Nicky Morgan:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In fact, I met some members of the Local Government Association and council leaders this morning to discuss exactly that issue. They welcomed the moves that we are making to clarify how the system will look in the future, and also the option of supporting schools which are providing excellent services, because there is nothing to stop the provision of those services from continuing. We will, of course, have more discussions as the programme proceeds.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Nicky Morgan:** I am going to make progress now, because a great many Members wish to speak in the debate.

As I have said, the academies programme reflects our core Conservative belief that public services should be run by front-line professionals. That means heads, teachers and governors running our schools. International evidence shows that autonomy of schools is linked to improved performance, and that an autonomous system must include strong school leadership and accountability. Academic studies show that, for instance,

“test scores are higher when schools manage their own budgets and recruit and select their own teachers”.

Schools do not have to follow a single way of doing things. Each school can develop a different approach that works for its pupils. Academies are better for teachers because they have greater freedom to innovate, and heads can reward them for their excellence. That freedom means that they can set pay, which enables them to attract and retain good teachers. Academies are better for pupils because it is easier for teachers to share best practice and take advantage of new opportunities, and for Governments to intervene if any evidence is found that schools are failing.

As we have said before, we want parents to be more involved in their children’s education, not less. As the Prime Minister said earlier, we are not suggesting, and have never suggested, that parents should no longer sit on governing bodies. We support the idea of parents being school governors. Many already play a valuable role in governance, and parents will always be encouraged to become governors or trustees.

However, there are other ways in which parents can be involved. For instance, the Flying High Trust in Nottinghamshire has a local governing body for each of its academies, with three elected parent representatives who receive not only an induction, but ongoing development so they can be really clear about their role in ensuring that the schools continue to be linked to the communities that they serve. We will also introduce more regular surveys of parental satisfaction, and display the results alongside examination results.

One issue that has not been addressed so far is the lack of intervention by some local authorities in schools that are failing or coasting. There are 42 local authorities that have not appointed an interim executive board since 2006, and 45 that have not issued warning notices since 2009.

**Andrew Percy** *rose—*

**Nicky Morgan:** I will give way to my hon. Friend. *[Interruption.]*

**Andrew Percy:** I am pleased that this is such a popular intervention.

My right hon. Friend has just referred to the role of local authorities. Some authorities have clearly frustrated the academy process, but that has not been the case in North Lincolnshire. May I commend to my right hon. Friend the model of educational standards boards that we have established there? Even post-academisation, the local authority accepts that these children are our children and we have an ongoing responsibility for them. The authority has concerns about a forced academisation programme, as indeed it should, but will my right hon. Friend look closely at a system that accepts that these children are our children whatever school they are at?

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I am still looking forward to visiting his constituency at some point to meet teachers in his area. I will of course look at these models. The achieving education excellence areas that we outlined in the White Papers may be a suitable model.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** I will take more interventions in a moment.

We have already been shown to respond quickly in the minority of cases where academies underperform. To date we have issued 154 formal notices to underperforming academies and free schools and changed the leadership in 129 cases of particular concern. The powers introduced under the Education and Adoption Act 2016 will allow us to intervene swiftly from day one—much more quickly than happened under many local authorities.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State not allow parents a say in whether their local school becomes an academy?

**Nicky Morgan:** We had that debate when the Education and Adoption Act was going through. We recognise that many new sponsors will involve parents, rightly, and we will encourage that in the academisation process.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** The hon. Member for Manchester Central asked why we were doing this now. On current trajectories, three quarters of secondary and a third of primary schools will be academies by 2020, even if we did not do anything else. That will, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) said, make it increasingly difficult for local authorities to manage an expensive bureaucracy with fewer and fewer schools. As I have said, we will work with local authorities to ensure that they are able to enter partnerships and work with schools.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** Something else that the Opposition have deliberately failed to understand is that this policy is fully funded. We have over £500 million available in this Parliament to build capacity, including recruiting—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. In fairness to the Secretary of State, she has given way a lot. If she wants to give way, that is fine, but do not keep clamouring and shouting because I want to get you all in and I will not achieve that.

**Nicky Morgan:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

As I say, we have over £500 million available in this Parliament to build capacity, including recruiting excellent sponsors and encouraging the development of strong multi-academy trusts. As ever, however, the back-of-a-fag-packet calculation that the hon. Member for Manchester Central seems so fond of, and that was put out by the Labour party press office, uses grossly inaccurate costings—in one case, for example, erroneously calculating

that the average cost of academisation will be £66,000. In fact, costs per academy have fallen from over £250,000 in 2010-11 to £32,000 today. The cost per academy will continue to fall significantly in the years ahead as we move towards full academisation.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): The Secretary of State talks about the £500 million available in this Parliament. Will she give an undertaking to publish in great detail the Department's costings to reassure us that this is indeed a fully funded policy and that all the costs have been fully taken into account? I am afraid to say that her figures seem a bit pie in the sky.

**Nicky Morgan:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that my figures are absolutely not pie in the sky. We publish a huge amount of information and if he wants to write to me about how much it will cost to academise all the schools in his constituency, I will be happy to respond.

**James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con) *rose*—

**Nicky Morgan:** I give way to my hon. Friend.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**James Berry:** I am glad that Members have been waiting for this. In Kingston, we have the best GCSE results in the country, bar the Isles of Scilly, and only one of the schools is not an academy. It is legitimate to have a debate about whether that model should be mandated throughout the country. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that whatever the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) misrepresented, what she did not misrepresent—*[Interruption.]* I am saying that she did not misrepresent—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: I know he wants to withdraw that immediately.

**James Berry:** What she did not misrepresent was the guff about asset stripping, privatisation and profit that many of her colleagues have engaged in.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Mr Berry, we are not being helpful to each other. You are withdrawing the comment about misrepresentation. I think you have got your question across. I am going to hear the Secretary of State. You have withdrawn the remark. That is great. Thank you.

**Nicky Morgan:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is passionate about this programme and about raising standards in schools in his constituency. I join him in that.

Let me refute another falsehood in the Opposition's motion—that we will force all schools to be part of multi-academy trusts. Schools will not be forced to join a trust with other schools. As it happens, many schools want to join a trust because they can see the benefits. Two thirds of current academies have chosen to be part of multi-academy trusts, and of course outstanding schools can set up their own MATs. But to be absolutely clear, we will never make any successful school, large or small, that is capable of operating alone, join a trust.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): On the Conservative Benches, we are grateful for the fact we have finally made progress on the issue of fairer funding, which is incredibly important—particularly in rural constituencies. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the progress on fairer funding does not depend in any way on enforced academisation?

**Nicky Morgan:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out that those on the Opposition Benches had 13 years to sort out the inequities in our school funding system and that we heard absolutely nothing from them. On the trajectories for moving on to the new funding formula, we hope to start in the 2017-18 financial year, and on academisation we have six years for schools to become academies and to work out the best way for them to do so and the collaboration that that will involve.

**Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way; she is being incredibly patient and long-suffering. We have many small schools in East Anglia. Can she confirm that, in the procedures for closure, the Secretary of State's final decision will always remain in place?

**Nicky Morgan:** Absolutely, but what I do not envisage under this process is the closure of small schools. If they are serving the community well, if they are popular with parents and pupils and if they are providing excellent education, why would we want to close them?

We know that just becoming an academy does not improve results in itself, but it does set heads, teachers and governors free to do the things that increase standards. Our reforms and the hard work of teachers have led to remarkable success—*[Interruption.]* It is a great shame that the shadow Secretary of State never wants to recognise the success in England's schools. We still have a long way to go to achieve excellent education everywhere, and we will work with schools and local councils to continue the transformation.

Our White Paper sets out our wider plans for the next five years, building on and extending our reforms to achieve educational excellence everywhere. Where great schools, great leaders and great teachers exist, we will let them do what they do best—help every child to achieve their full potential. Where they do not, we will step in to build capacity, raise standards and provide confidence for parents and children. We will put children and parents first. The Opposition's motion has no ambition to achieve that. For that reason, I am going to ask the House to reject their motion, to support our amendment and to back our reforms to deliver educational excellence everywhere.

5.7 pm

**Sir Gerald Kaufman** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): One of the most morale-destroying assignments that I have had in this House has been to read this White Paper. It is riddled with jargon, with ungrammatical structures and with split infinitives. For this to come from the Department for Education is particularly unacceptable. I come from a family of education. I taught for a short time after I left university, and two of my sisters were teachers all their working lives. I know the challenge of education at first hand. Having read this White Paper, I do not believe that the Department knows what that challenge is.

This 122-page White Paper contains a huge number of issues that we could deal with today, but it is inevitable that we shall concentrate on the forced academisation policy. There is no justification for it, and that is illustrated by the fact that it started in my constituency during the last Parliament. An effort was made to force Wright Robinson College in my constituency to become an academy, and the only reason that that did not happen was that the then Secretary of State—now the Secretary of State for Justice—ordered the withdrawal of a warning notice that would have forced Wright Robinson to become an academy.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree with my constituent Glendra Read, a governor at a school that has fought academisation before, when she says that

“If schools and parents are meant to have ‘freedom’, then our freedom of choice is to remain within”

local authority control?

**Sir Gerald Kaufman:** That is a valid point.

Wright Robinson College was rebuilt under the Labour Government at a cost of £47 million and is a model structure. I quote from a letter that I received from the headteacher last month:

“On the evening of Tuesday 2 March 2016, I attended a meeting with my Deputies and the Ofsted Team, to receive their detailed feedback on the Section 5 Inspection that took place on 1 and 2 March 2016. I then experienced the proudest moment in my entire professional career when we were told that the College had received the full five ‘Outstanding Judgements’ against the criteria of the new and challenging Ofsted Framework.”

That would not have happened if the Government had had their way.

There was an attempt to turn Birchfields Primary School in my constituency into an academy, but I worked with the staff and governors to prevent that and we won. We do not always win. Not long ago, another school in my constituency, now Cedar Mount Academy, was forced to become an academy in a particularly odious manner because it was obliged to merge with schools that are not even in the city of Manchester. From that came a person called Dana Ross-Wawrzynski, who turned the whole situation into what she called “Bright Futures” for which she pays herself more than £200,000 a year. That is what academisation is about: people making money out of an unnecessary structure that does not benefit pupils.

We read in the White Paper that the agglomerations of schools that would be put into academy groups are in some cases not even in the same county. It is nothing to do with locality, local feeling or local sentiment, and parents will have no voice at all. The Government are to create something called “Parent Portal” through which it is alleged that parents will have a voice, but they will not. They will have no voice in the decision as to which school their child will attend or in the quality of the child's education. The White Paper offers remedies, one of which is to go to the Department for Education. However, if I write to the Secretary of State, she will send me a courteous letter, but she will not deal with the issue that the parent has raised, because she will say that she deals only with policy, not individual or family issues. Another course parents can take is to go to an ombudsman. I worked for Harold Wilson when he

[Sir Gerald Kaufman]

created the ombudsman system, but can anyone tell me when somebody went to an ombudsman and actually got a result that improved the situation?

The structure the Government are setting out in this White Paper is compulsory. It is not going to give local authorities any voice. It contains a section about the voice of local authorities, but if we actually read it, we see that local authorities do not actually have any voice, except that they are assigned the role of making sure that kids get to a school. Well, that is not going to happen with an independent academy run by people who are paid hundreds of thousands of pounds—they will tell the local authority to get lost.

This is not simply about the local authority; it is also about the fact that the Government are going to create 500 free schools. We have free schools in my constituency. We have free schools run by the Church of England, and they are very good. We have free schools run by the Catholic Church, and they are very good. The Muslim community wants to be involved as well, but it will not get involved in this because we will be faced with an edict from this Government, who do not care about public education at all. That is the issue: academies are not about public education; academies are about giving a small number of people authority over millions of people.

**Ruth Cadbury:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Sir Gerald Kaufman:** Of course.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. May I just say that we are very tight for time in this debate?

**Ruth Cadbury:** What many of us in areas with a growing population were looking for in a White Paper was the ability to bring on new schools quickly. In five years, we have not been able in Hounslow to deliver the community school that is needed. Does my right hon. Friend agree that despite the ability of faith schools and some other academy trusts to develop new schools, the community is excluded?

**Sir Gerald Kaufman:** My hon. Friend is right about that. The fact is that, certainly in my constituency, where I am heavily involved with the schools, it is not a matter of the Government providing a choice for the parents; it is the Government taking away the choice of parents and putting it in the hands of extremely well-paid bureaucrats. This Government are making a big mistake and they need to think again.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. We are now on a five-minute limit.

5.18 pm

**Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con):** This debate is actually about children and the interests of children; it is about making sure that they have opportunities to fulfil their lives. We would not be having a debate like this if local education authorities in the past had delivered opportunities to all children in a proper way—that is an absolute fact.

The Labour Government under Tony Blair would have agreed with me, because they started off the academies programme and they emphasised the importance of “Education, education, education.”

**Wes Streeting:** The hon. Gentleman is right to pay tribute to the last Labour Government’s academies plan for what it did for school improvement in the most disadvantaged areas. Surely he would agree with the former Education Secretary Lord Blunkett, who said that the current Government’s approach, which is not based on evidence, risks

“discrediting the entire academy programme”.

**Neil Carmichael:** Lord Blunkett was correct when he was expressing concern about schools in Yorkshire and wondering why there was not a commission on schools there to deal with the problems that he has identified—that came up in the all-party group on Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire—so I think the hon. Gentleman makes a good point well.

We need to think about the current position in our education system. The “long tail of underachievement” report published by Ofsted back in 2012-13 makes it clear what the problem is: there are too many failing schools or coasting schools, particularly in the primary sector. They are the ones letting down young people and causing a problem. When children leave primary school without the ability to read or write, as too many children did back in 2010, they struggle and they continue to struggle in secondary school. The evidence is frightening. Analysis of the data on children who had a bad start shows that they never recover.

We need to think of an alternative way, and the academies programme has delivered success. More than 80% of academies are good or outstanding. That is why it is important to have more academies. However, the framework for academies needs to be carefully explored. It is important for us to understand what a good multi-academy trust looks like, and the Education Committee will be looking into that. That does not mean that all academies should become members of MATs, but it does mean that a good MAT will attract a lot of good schools because of the range of opportunities it provides, the emphasis on partnership, the strength of leadership and so on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) spoke about primary schools, and that is exactly the right subject for us to talk about. We must make sure that primary schools get together, work together and form partnerships. That is why I was pleased to be present when the Association of School and College Leaders and the National Governors Association launched their report entitled “Forming or Joining a Group of Schools: staying in control of your school’s destiny”. That is about bringing schools together, hopefully through a structure that will benefit their transition from maintained to academy status if that is a direction of travel that they need to take.

**Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op):** Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the issue of choice? Whitmore High School in my constituency was rated outstanding by Ofsted last year and is on the Department’s list of 100 best schools for value added. Why should it be forced to choose to become an academy?

**Neil Carmichael:** Because we want all schools to be able to be autonomous, to work with other schools and to form relationships which are right for their pupils. We always talk about the worst schools or the best schools, but we should focus on those in the middle. They are the ones that provide most of the education and tend to coast if that is allowed to occur. Too many local authorities have not intervened quickly enough or robustly enough when the situation demanded it. That is the context in which the Secretary of State correctly referred to interim executive boards.

On parent governors, the Government are not saying, as I understand it, that there will no longer be any parent governors. There are two points to make. The obvious one is that they are not being outlawed. Secondly, everyone can be a parent governor. It is not necessary to be a parent in order to be a non-parent governor. That is important. The idea that parent governors are an exclusive source of wisdom may well be right in some schools, but not in all.

One of the reasons why I set up the all-party group on school leadership and governance was that I was concerned that we did not have sufficient skills or all the skills needed for a governing body. We talked about the role of stakeholders, including parent governors. There was general agreement in that group, of which the NGA is the secretariat, that skills were the most important thing to recruit to a governing body. It is therefore right to talk in the terms that we are using.

I want quickly to mention regional schools commissioners, because they will play a really important role in this. The Education Committee discussed that role with the Department through a formal inquiry, and we will continue to look at it, because as the academies programme develops, of course, we will need to see more scale and capacity through the regional schools commissioners. I put it on the agenda right now that that needs to be considered in the medium term.

Finally, fairer funding is a critical part of the story, because it will give schools more flexibility and ensure that those that have suffered so badly in the past as a result of underfunding get a fairer slice of the funding. Schools should be encouraged to grow when the demand is there, and I think the Department is doing that. Last but not least, we have to think about catchment areas. One of the things that I find stultifying my area is the county council's refusal to be a bit more open-minded about catchment areas and the ability of parents to go past one school or whatever as they choose. Those are the points that I wanted to make, and I think that the Education Committee is right—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I call Marion Fellows.

5.25 pm

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I stand here as a member of the third party in this House. We will be abstaining this evening, on both the motion and the amendment. However, I am a member of the Education Committee—I sometimes feel that I have international observer status—and, on that basis, I would like to make a few points on the White Paper.

I was very interested to read in the White Paper that the national curriculum will become a benchmark, hopefully to be exceeded. I find that difficult to understand. When

we did our report on holocaust education, we found that it is supported by the Government but not required to be taught in all schools. I find that quite strange. I wonder how far that will pertain if the elements of the White Paper go ahead.

Another interesting part of my work on the Education Committee involved having private discussions with teachers and their representatives on how to attract and retain teachers, which is a very large problem in England. I fail to see how having six years of what is perceived to be forced academisation will help to attract and retain teachers, especially if, as can happen in academies, terms and conditions will not be national, in the sense that I understand it from Scotland.

I find it strange that the forced removal of local authorities from schooling in England, against the wishes of local authorities, parents, governors, trade unions and others, will go ahead, and that the Secretary of State can match giving them new responsibilities with taking away any control they have over what happens in schools.

I also find it interesting, from an international perspective, that it was the Chancellor of the Exchequer who brought this matter to the House in the first instance, followed shortly by the Secretary of State's White Paper. The Chancellor always makes me think of costs, and I am concerned for English schools, pupils, parents and everyone involved, that the cost of academisation will take away from money spent on teaching children. That is a really important point. I have a background in further education in Scotland so I know that change costs and that focus can sometimes shift.

Finally, the Department for Education is currently unable to present its accounts because of the problems involved in consolidating academies' accounts with its own. If the academisation of all schools goes ahead, that will create further issues and problems. I think that any delay in publishing accounts for any Government Department is a delay in public accountability.

I realise that this is a very passionate and forceful debate on both sides of the House. I wish all Members well in it, but I will not be taking any further part.

5.29 pm

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this important debate and to follow the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), with whom I served for a while on the Education Committee.

I applaud my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for her statement at the beginning of the White Paper. She says that education

“is a matter of social justice—extending opportunity to every child”.

A headteacher in Romsey wrote to me immediately the White Paper was released, describing it as the best White Paper he had ever read.

As I said, I was a member of the Education Committee until recently, and I have a feeling I might be on my way back at some point. I joined the Committee during work on its 2014-15 Session report on academies and free schools. As part of that inquiry, we met inspirational school leaders and chief executives of academy chains, we visited schools and we met primary heads involved in multi-academy trusts. We did not look just at the

[*Caroline Nokes*]

good; we also delved into where academy chains were underperforming. We came up with a report that drew some interesting conclusions.

In Romsey, we have two excellent academies, both of which are converter, stand-alone secondary academies led by great headteachers, to whom I pay tribute for their vision and determination. Today, I have received exhortations from not one constituent but many, asking me to speak out against academies because they are supposedly undemocratic and exclude communities from having an input into how they are run. That is not my experience at all. In fact, I would go further: there is enormous community input into both the academies in Romsey, which go out of their way to involve local businesses, to bring in people from outside to take part in how the school is run, and to give the best opportunities and experiences to their pupils. Both academies are members of the Eastleigh consortium of secondary schools and colleges, and both are real leading lights in sharing best practice and spreading their knowledge and expertise. So, no, I will not speak out against academies, because my experience of them is excellent, and I pay tribute to Heather McIlroy of the Mountbatten School and Jonathan de Sausmarez of Romsey School for the fantastic job they do for Romsey's children.

However, I must emphasise the conclusions the Select Committee report drew. We do not have to dig far into the report to find the quote given by the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell):

“Current evidence does not allow us to draw...conclusions on whether academies are a positive force for change.”

I fully accept that the report is now a year old, and there will be additional data, so it may now be possible to have a fuller picture. The report certainly called on the DFE to do further research into the impact of academy status on primary schools.

In Romsey and Southampton North, not one primary school has converted to an academy, and that may be for many good reasons. I have certainly spoken to some excellent headteachers—most notably the head of the most outstanding primary school in my constituency, which is repeatedly rated as outstanding by Ofsted—and the response I have consistently received from her as to why the school has not converted is that those involved have looked at the possibility many times and have not thought that it was right for them. They have welcomed the support and the challenge they have had over the years from the local education authority. Far from seeing that as the shackles of local government, they have enjoyed the robust support and challenge they have had from a consistently high-performing children's services department.

It is of course possible that my view is entirely coloured by the opinions of headteachers who have worked with Hampshire County Council over many years, and that, were the authority less good, I might be faced with headteachers actively seeking liberation from its bonds. However, they have had the freedom to do that, and they have not done so.

In Hampshire, many of our rural schools are already federated, sharing headteachers and best practice incredibly successfully. I point to the example of the brilliant Jo Cottrell, who is executive head of the outstanding

Halterworth Primary School and two smaller village schools in Awbridge and Wellow. I would also like to mention Marcus Roe, head of Ampfield School and of John Keble School in Hursley, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine).

**Steve Brine:** On that point, my hon. Friend and I have both had a letter from the aforementioned Mr Roe. John Keble School in Hursley is in the federation she mentioned. I was struck, and I wonder whether she was, by one line in his letter:

“Surely, the model of ‘headteachers know best’—which we all agree with—

“also applies to whether we believe academy status is right for us or not.”

As I said earlier, many of my primary schools, like hers, do not believe it is right for them, and they have had the choice to become academies, but they have not exercised it. I wonder whether she noted that line in his letter.

**Caroline Nokes:** I noted that line and that which said:

“Hampshire has been highly regarded by Ofsted for the excellent work it has done to support children in the county and beyond.”

I appreciate that Hampshire may be able to continue to provide services to schools. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to look at ways that the good can be exempted from a system of prescription.

I want to emphasise an important element of the Education Committee report. Page 64 states:

“Academisation is not always successful nor is it the only proven alternative for a struggling school.”

This morning I spoke to Ruth Evans, headteacher of Cantell school in Southampton, who has emphasised that Cantell is the fastest improving school in Southampton and rated in the top 5% in the country for value added, but it is not an academy and it has not been able to convert, because of the private finance initiative agreement to which it is bound. What happens to such schools, and how many others are in the same boat? Ruth's view—I will conclude on this point, because I think she is absolutely right—is that what really matter are the staff and the culture. The school pursues partnerships with its cluster of primary schools and undertakes a peer review to ensure that it is at the forefront of improvement.

5.35 pm

**Mr Geoffroy Robinson** (Coventry North West) (Lab): I am glad to take part in this debate, because there is a situation involving a school in west Coventry that affects my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham). I have tried to draw the issue to the Secretary of State's attention and I have asked her for a meeting. It concerns the closure of one academy—it has been a failing academy for a few years—and the setting up of another. The new academy is being given a great amount of Government funding and they are closing what used to be a fine school, but which was turned into an academy under pressure from this Government.

I say to the Secretary of State that academisation in itself solves nothing. It is not a panacea. The case for compulsory academisation does not exist. The Government have no mandate for it and there is no proof that it is a universally popular or effective policy. If the Secretary

of State would accept that, it would be a great step forward and she would have to rethink a major plank of the White Paper.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Robinson:** I will not give way, because time is limited and many Members on both sides of the House wish to speak.

If the Secretary of State will not take my word for it, she should listen to the words of wisdom being spoken by her fellow Conservative Members, who also wish to undo the policy. Nobody sees the case for compulsory academisation of all our schools.

The whole point about education should be choice. We agree with that. There is a role for academies—we started them and there is no doubt that they have a role to play. In many instances they have been successful and stimulating and have set an example, but we cannot make one size fit all, and nor should we try to do so. If that is going to be the Government's national policy, it will be a failure. I fear that one of the consequences will be similar situations to that in Coventry, where one school is being forced to close and another academy is going to start up barely a mile down the road. It does not have places and there is no planning or demand. The main demand for the school down the road comes from the parents of children at the school that is going to close, who are looking for places that do not exist in the new academy. There is a lack of planning and forethought. That is what happens when someone believes they have found the holy grail or the secret key that can unlock the solution for all schools.

I beg the Secretary of State to think again, because the situation in Coventry is as follows: we are closing one school, which is a sports academy, and we are eliminating a boys-only school, a girls-only school and parental choice.

**Nicky Morgan** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Robinson:** It is no good the Secretary of State shaking her head, because every single one of those statements is correct. We are eliminating and restricting parental choice and we do not even know what we are going to replace it with. The policy is bound to fail. If it is forced on the rest of the country, I fear that the situation in Coventry will be replicated throughout England and Wales, to the great detriment of those people whose interests the Secretary of State is trying to promote, and to the extinction of choice as we know it, which is fundamental to improvement in the education system. We accept and agree with what the Secretary of State preaches but in practice denies.

5.39 pm

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): I am glad that this fascinating debate has been secured, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate. I particularly wanted to take part because in Telford, we have recent experience of the damaging effect of failing secondary schools on our young people. We have also had the beneficial effects of tackling the underperformance of those failing secondary schools by placing them in an established multi-academy trust chain, and I want to share that positive experience with the House.

Last year, four secondary schools in Telford were placed in special measures, having received inadequate ratings from Ofsted, and the education of 2,000 children was affected. In Telford, we have significant pockets of deprivation and disadvantage. I am sure we all agree that a good education is an open door to opportunity for young people to build a future and get on, no matter what their circumstances, where they live or where they come from. I want the best possible education for every young person in my constituency.

There is no doubt that we have an added responsibility to young people who come from the least affluent backgrounds. Underachievement in school is a massive hindrance. It reinforces disadvantage, and we should never stand by and accept it as inevitable. Good education is about far more than just exam results. I am sure that if any of us was asked to give a definition of good education, we would include strong leadership, excellent governance, high expectations of our young people, the instilling of a sense of self-worth and personal responsibility, and the creation of an environment in which children feel cared for and valued. I am sure that we also agree that achieving a minimum of five A to C grade GCSEs, including maths and English, is an essential entry point to jobs, training, apprenticeships and further education. Without that tool, our young people in Telford will be left behind.

In Telford, all four of the secondary schools that were judged inadequate fell below the Government's 40% floor target. Two of the schools fell below one third, and in one school almost three quarters of children failed to achieve five good GCSEs, including maths and English, in consecutive years. Overall, 80% of children in receipt of the pupil premium leave school without five GCSEs. Those children have been failed for a lifetime.

So, what did we do in Telford? What happened to solve the problem? The Department for Education got involved smartish. The schools joined an established multi-academy chain entirely free from local authority involvement. There was a full restructure of staff, shared leadership, new timetables, new day structures, new approaches to behaviour, and new leadership and governance. It is early days, and I will not claim that all the problems have been solved, but an early DfE monitoring visit found excellent examples of good practice. Two successful Ofsted visits showed the impact of the academy trust and its leaders. Those strengths were identified. In fact, Ofsted said—it is important to put this on record—that the academy trust chain had

“played a crucial role in removing barriers to the academy's progress...the structures, mechanisms and foundations are now in place to begin to secure sustainable improvements.”

We can see from Telford's example that the academy structure makes it easier to put in place the essentials to drive up standards, and it allows underperformance to be tackled. That is what matters, so I support the Government's determination to ensure that every child has the best start in life, a good education and the opportunity to be the best they can be.

I sound a note of caution on primary schools. We have many good primary schools—17—in Telford. Many teachers and parents tell me that they do not want unnecessary change or interference where our children are thriving and achieving. That is what matters. Do our children thrive and achieve in Telford? If they do, that is a good thing.

5.44 pm

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): I want to pick up on what the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) has said. All Members, from all parts of the House, strive to make sure that every school is a good school, and that children are taught by great teachers. Academisation of schools does not, in itself, achieve that. It is important that we make that clear and that we do not pretend otherwise.

I would like to send my condolences to the family of John Cope, a former regional secretary of the GMB, who passed away yesterday. John fought long and hard for teachers all across north London, fighting to ensure that all schools were good ones, and those schools always welcomed John to their school. This might be wide of the mark—I could be completely wrong—but as I read and tried to make sense of the White Paper, I thought that part of this policy might be about stopping trade unions supporting their members. Now, more than at any other time, the one thing that will keep people—whether they work as a teacher, a cleaner, a dinner lady or a teaching assistant—connected and united in an educational establishment is the trade union movement. Rest in peace, John. The fight continues.

In Brent Central, we have five academies. Of all our other schools, only one is rated inadequate. The schools that became academies under Labour were failing schools that became academies in order to turn themselves around, which has indeed worked. That was a process for schools, rather than something that was forced on them. That point will be made throughout this debate.

In 2015, a parent contacted me in complete distress, saying, “They are forcing us to turn into an academy.” She asked me to go to a meeting, and I said, “Yes, not a problem.” I was quite surprised at how distressed all the parents and teachers were at the meeting. I was careful to obtain all the facts before forming an opinion, because that is what we do. I was told that, despite the objections of the unions and the parents, no proper information had been given to them. The parents wanted to have a ballot—a secret one, even—and they were willing to pay for it, but the school would not allow that to happen. Strikes and marches by the parents followed, and the kids were distressed, because the school was forced to turn into an academy. I worry that that will follow when other schools are forced to turn into academies.

Councillor Melinda Tilley, the cabinet member for education on Oxfordshire County Council, said on BBC Radio 4’s “Today” programme last month:

“It means a lot of little primary schools will be forced to go into multi-academy trusts and I just feel it’s the wrong time, in the wrong place. I’m fed up with diktats from above saying you will do this and you won’t do that. This is not why I became a Conservative. It makes my blood boil. I’m put in a position where I can’t protect schools. One size does not fit all. I think they’ve gone bonkers.”

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making some very good points about small rural schools. I do not believe that the Secretary of State addressed those points when she was questioned by MPs from her own side of the House. I have schools in my constituency with as few as 13 pupils. What kind of academy trust will want to take on a school that small?

**Dawn Butler:** That is a good point, and my hon. Friend makes it very well. The chief executive of England’s largest multi-academy trust, AET, has admitted that there is less autonomy for schools in academy trusts than there is for schools that are maintained by local authorities. He has even said that schools will not be able to opt out if the ethos does not fit that of the school. That is a problem.

The Secretary of State talks about money going into schools. It is a fact that there has been a cut in the amount of money going into schools. Actually, with the loss of the contextual value added funding, many schools have lost up to £800 per pupil, and the pupil premium has done nothing to bring that money back into the school system. It is absolutely outrageous.

I have been trying to find out what the proposal is really about. It is certainly not about ensuring that all schools are good schools and that we have good education for kids in Brent. Local authorities will pick up the legal cost of doing this. I do not know what the cost will be, because we are apparently wrong. We had it as £1.3 billion, but the Secretary of State says something different. It would be nice to know definitively what the figure will be.

What I can say is that we will lose £260 million in London schools alone. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), who is the Labour candidate for London Mayor, has not only said that he will work “with councils to challenge coasting or poor-performing schools”, but that it is

“a scandal that more than 44,000 children in London are taught in classes of more than 30—with some taught in classes of more than 40.”

He says:

“I’ll play a city-wide strategic leadership role, seeking to make a big dent in the school places crisis.”

I urge the Government to stop and listen to the teachers who are staying in the profession, as well as to those who are leaving it, and just do a U-turn on this flawed White Paper.

5.50 pm

**Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler). I declare any necessary interests as my wife is a primary school teacher.

I want to raise my concerns and those of my constituents about the proposal to require every school to become an academy by 2020. Let me be clear: I believe that there is a place for academies in our education system. They have played a part in helping to turn around schools and improve educational attainment for children throughout the country, although I do not believe that that improvement can be attributed solely to their being academies. I am not convinced that academies are the only direction for our education system or that they will somehow deliver the next great leap in academic results. First and foremost, there is no evidence that academies are automatically better than state-maintained schools. Indeed, there are plenty of good and outstanding schools throughout the country, including in my constituency, which are maintained by the local authority.

Furthermore, I fear that forcing schools to become academies, especially when they do not want to, will be an unnecessary shake-up for the school and the local council.

**Bob Stewart:** Academies can be really good—for example, the Harris academy in Beckenham, which has improved greatly. However, we are considering a White Paper—an evolving document for discussion—not a directive, and I disagree with the idea if parents and governors do not want it to happen.

**Will Quince:** Call me old-fashioned, but I hold the view that if a school is well governed, well run and performing well, it should be left alone and allowed to do its job.

No one quite knows what the outcome of the proposal will be, especially given that there seems to be a rather disjointed approach to the role of local authorities. We are telling local authorities that they are no longer responsible for schools, but still responsible for home-to-school transport and admissions. They are expected to be champions for parents when they are still responsible for the two most contentious matters when it comes to schools.

I do not believe that moving the control of schools from local authorities, which are run by elected representatives, to unelected regional schools commissioners makes schools more accountable to parents. We need decentralisation of education, which gives more control to teachers and parents. The proposal risks centralising power in Whitehall and giving power to unelected bureaucrats.

As my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) pointed out, we are considering a White Paper, and there is therefore time to put the proposals on hold and have a rethink. The White Paper is unquestionably generating a lot of uncertainty in our schools, and we should be in no doubt that the public have concerns.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is no doubt and there should be no concern about the role of parents as governors? I declare an interest as a parent and a parent governor. It is clear from the White Paper that parents will be encouraged to continue to serve on governing boards.

**Will Quince:** On that one point I am very disappointed by the Opposition's motion. I largely agree with their points, and, given that we are talking about a White Paper, I could even have supported the motion, had it not been factually incorrect. *[Interruption.]* There is no question but that it is factually incorrect. It has a word missing. We do not mark exam papers on the basis of, "It was what they meant to say, so we'll give them an A."

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry—the hon. Gentleman is a most courteous individual, but we must now move on. There are 21 remaining colleagues who wish to speak and probably fewer than 50 minutes. There will now be a three-minute time limit in a bid to ensure that we maximise the input.

5.54 pm

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): As a member of the Education Committee, I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute this afternoon.

As a member of the Petitions Committee, I am aware of the significant public interest in this issue, with petitions about it that have more than 150,000 signatures. But most importantly, as a constituency MP and a parent of primary-age children, I am in a state of real disbelief at the frankly ludicrous proposal to force all schools to go down the academy route by 2020. I know my view is shared by many constituents, parents, teachers and support staff across Newcastle upon Tyne North. As with so many of this Government's policies, it is entirely unclear what problem this policy is intended to fix. It is an absolute distraction from many of the real issues that the Education Secretary should be dealing with urgently.

Next week, parents across the country will find out whether their child has a school place in September, through an admissions process that is increasingly difficult for local authorities to manage. Councils such as Newcastle find themselves in the impossible position of being unable to consider establishing new community schools to cope with existing demand while being legally responsible for ensuring places. Demand is only going to increase given the increase in house building expected during the next few years, with 21,000 new homes across Newcastle by 2030. I genuinely want to understand this, and so would like an explanation of how local authorities are going to ensure that there is new school capacity at the right time in the right places under the current proposals. Any enlightenment from the Minister would be welcome.

The White Paper states that local authorities will retain a role in

"Ensuring every child has a school place...including that there are sufficient school, special school and alternative provision places to meet demand."

But the Local Government Association has highlighted that

"Under these new plans, councils will remain legally responsible for making sure that all children have a school place, but it is wrong that neither they nor the Government will have any powers to force local schools to expand if they don't want to."

As for other pressing issues, the Education Secretary should turn her attention to teachers' increasing workloads and the recruitment crisis. It is little wonder that SCHOOLS NorthEast has said that schools across the region

"face an uphill battle with nearly 9 in 10...Head Teachers reporting issues with recruiting staff in the past year."

Teachers feel overworked and underappreciated.

Instead of dealing with those crucial issues, the Government are focusing on a top-down forced reorganisation that will see 20,000 schools come under their direct control. The Department for Education cannot even file its own accounts to Parliament on time, so can it really cope with that additional workload? It is presiding over a total fiasco with the new key stage 1 and 2 tests, with information about delivery given very late to teachers. Finally, at a time when we are reading that many schools in poor areas are now "running on empty", who is going to pay for all this?

5.57 pm

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), who I think must have been reading a different White Paper from the one that I have read.

[Richard Graham]

I start by tackling a comment from the shadow Secretary of State. In moving the motion, she made some totally unexceptional remarks, many of which I agreed with, but said that the White Paper was not about school improvement or autonomy but about a forced ideology that was not necessary. Let me tell her and others about my ideology on this issue. She and other Opposition Front Benchers occasionally use the word “ideological” in a negative and derogatory way. I will quote from the Google result:

“An ideology is a body of ideas, and those who agree with the main idea of something take an ideological stand to support it.”

My ideology on education is very simple: everyone should have access to good education. One aspect of our job as MPs is to help to find ways that give the strongest likelihood of our schools’ providing that. I am happy to take a stand to support that. I suspect that the shadow Education Secretary is, and I hope that every Member across the House is. That is what the White Paper aims at.

My right hon. Friend the Education Secretary has spelled it out very clearly that, through the White Paper, she is trying to achieve a discussion on how to resolve the problem that, as she says, there are

“too many pockets of educational underperformance—areas where too many young people miss out on the chance to benefit from the best possible education. This is deeply unfair.”

That starting point should be shared by all of us. This is a White Paper, not legislation—a point that many of our constituents do not seem to have grasped in their emails about the issue. We should be looking at what ideas are proposed in the White Paper.

Several points of interest have not yet been mentioned, including an independent college of training, which must be a good idea. We would all like to know more details about changes to qualified teacher status, but it is an interesting idea. The White Paper mentions a fairer national funding formula—surely we are all in favour of that, although it has not yet been mentioned by any Opposition Member so far today.

The debate has focused on two aspects: changes to a skill-based requirement on the selection of governors; and the conversion of schools into academies. Let me discuss that briefly—I will have to be very brief because you reduced the time limit by two minutes, Mr Speaker, just before I got up to speak. I have time to say only that anyone who listens to this debate must understand that parents can, should and will have a key role on the governing boards of academies, and the business of whether all schools should be converted to academies can wait for a fuller debate.

6 pm

**Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): Let me start with an old proverb: “It takes a village to raise a child.” Local parents and communities must be at the heart of decision making about their children, to increase accountability across schools. Constituencies such as mine have added complexities regarding what teachers face because of community demographics and socio-economic factors. I cannot go and sell to my community and constituents a White Paper that is not based on evidence or the needs of that local community, or that

contains unnecessary costs that will not tackle deep-rooted issues of failure and falling educational standards. Funds have been cut for pupils and pupil places, and in my constituency some schools have not had funding through the schools building programme allocated to them and have had to stop their work. We must address such issues in my local schools.

We need investment, not drawn-out and expensive governance change. Structural changes do not tackle poor attainment—in fact, they detract from it, and that does not support headteachers and teachers in leading their staff and developing our children and their education. Instead, we focus on targets, as opposed to achievements and developing our children, and that is simply not good enough.

As many Members have highlighted, the Government have not hit on a magic formula. We have seen massive outcome disparity from academisation, and massive attainment difference in the chains into which the academy is incorporated, in much the same way that different local authorities get different results. Governance changes are not a substitute for front-line investment or an answer for failures, and I urge the Government to rethink them.

In conclusion, I like cooking and my mother always says to me, “If you’re going to cook a curry and it is not right, changing the pot and getting a fancy one will not fix the curry.” We need to get the ingredients right for this, and those in the White Paper do not make that curry for my constituents in Bradford West. I urge the Secretary of State to rethink this issue.

6.2 pm

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): I rise primarily in praise of academies, because in my constituency their spread has been transformative. We have some of the finest schools in the country, and I want the system that has brought us such success to be offered to many more children across the nation. In my constituency, six of our seven state schools have achieved academy status, and all save one produced results that greatly exceed the national average. The other one began to convert to academy status only in 2015, since when Ofsted reports that it is making very good progress.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way because I know that he is pressed for time, but I wish to back up what he has said, particularly for the secondary system. For example, in Taunton Deane in January, Court Fields School, which had problems, became an academy and was highlighted by Ofsted inspectors as having made vast improvements, including a 20% increase in maths results.

**Julian Knight:** My hon. Friend has added grist to my mill.

The greatest success in my constituency has been Tudor Grange Academy, which for four consecutive years has registered more than 90% of its students as achieving five A to C grades, including in maths at the end of year 11. We also have our first primary school, St James, which I am pleased to report has risen above the national average for reading, writing and mathematics. It is clear that putting teachers and headteachers in charge is a recipe for success. Those Solihull school

success stories should give pause to all those who deny that academies can make a powerful, positive difference to our young people.

I believe that Solihull, with its very high levels of academisation and excellent results, is a model for the future of our education system. A first-rate school system is essential if our children are to compete in the globalised economy they will grow up in. In too many instances, the old structures have failed to help talented young people to fulfil their potential.

At a time of great pressure on public finances, it is to the Government's credit that they have chosen to invest so heavily in education. However, I have certain concerns about the academisation proposals with regard to rural primary schools. I would like to see whether, in further discussions, we can allay concerns about whether those schools are the right size and whether the process can be managed effectively over the extensive six-year time period.

In the main, the reforms give school leaders the freedom and authority to find educational solutions that work best for them, based on their first-hand experience and understanding. In particular, they are a vote of confidence in our teachers. As my right hon. Friend pointed out, teachers will now be afforded the same status as other professionals, such as those in law, medicine and the sciences.

Our move away from the top-down approach to reform has other benefits. A sad consequence of the central control of our school system has been an unhelpful level of standardisation. In pursuit of the laudable goal of equality, the drive has too often been to make sure that every school is the same. Our predecessors knew far less than we do about how pupils learn. We are now aware that children learn in many different ways and that a one-size-fits-all approach leaves too many far behind.

6.6 pm

**John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): Einstein said that the definition of insanity was doing the same thing again and again and expecting a different outcome. At the start of every Parliament somebody suggests that, before political capital is exhausted, there should be an attempt to restructure a major public service, with the hopeful, if naive, expectation that delivery will somehow be improved.

In 2010, the health service was turned upside down for reasons that people have now largely forgotten. Well, that all turned out so well! In 2016, it is the turn of the school and education sector. To be fair, the radical change started in 2010 with the introduction of the Academies Act 2010. That Act was rushed through the Commons before the ink was dry on the coalition agreement. Even then, there was hostility to parental involvement. I moved an amendment to guarantee a parental ballot if governors were undecided on conversion to academy status. It was voted down on 26 July 2010. It was supported, incidentally, by Ed Balls and the Labour party, but by too few of my own party, who at that stage had a misplaced faith in the good intentions of their coalition colleagues.

To be fair to the Government, they are entirely serious in their attempt to raise standards and equalise life chances. I want to give them credit for that. However, they seem to have forgotten that all the research shows

that the really decisive factor in a child's educational outcome is having the parents onside, empowered and involved. They seem to have forgotten that the evidence on the benefits of academisation is at best equivocal. They seem to have forgotten that money used on the process of academisation cannot also be used for revising the school formula—it cannot be allocated and spent twice. They also seem to have forgotten their own legislation on coasting schools, because they are actually abolishing schools in name. They seem to have forgotten the painful progress we have all made on the national curriculum, because it simply will not apply.

I am struggling to explain such selective amnesia, such bewitchment of minds. I have decided that two irrational forces are at play. One is a magical belief in the benefits of renaming schools and altering their governance. Whatever the educational problem—slow progress, poor behaviour, low aspiration—the answer, the universal magic, is academisation. The second irrational force that has to be acknowledged is the active distrust, positive dislike and contempt in current Conservative and Government culture for local councils. My local primaries are high achieving. They are happy with their LEA relationship. They are busy, hard-pressed and fun to be at. To them, this change is disruptive, unwelcome and—by any measure—utterly pointless.

6.9 pm

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Portsmouth South) (Con): We all agree that every child needs an excellent education, but I was disappointed to read the Opposition motion, which attempts to stall our efforts to deliver it. Academisation has been a lifeline for some schools in my constituency. For many years, lots of schools in my constituency were at the bottom of the league tables, and the local authority was failing to bring about improvement. The new director of education in Portsmouth city council is making a positive difference, but that does not wipe the slate clean for the many children who have been let down.

Charter Academy in my constituency is one example of where academisation has been an enormous and immediate success. Threatened with closure and placed in emergency measures in 2009, as St Luke's School, Charter Academy is now one of the most improved schools in the country. Free from local authority controls, the teachers and leadership of Charter Academy, with parents included, have shown that putting more power into the front line has vastly improved the life chances of its pupils, who are largely from the most deprived area.

Ark Ayrton is a primary school in the same deprived area. The head was not happy about being forcibly academised but she later said that she had wished it had happened a lot earlier. She now gets the professional development, including resources and the ability to innovate, that was lacking before. Giving teachers power and the ability to teach in their own unique style is one of the mainstays of the new curriculum. I hope that these freedoms will attract more people into teaching. That is one reason why I welcome the freedom of headteachers to set their own pay and conditions, and I hope that the freedoms will include job sharing and flexible hours.

In fact, I would like to see a much more flexible working day, with schools able to extend the working day, as mentioned in the White Paper, so that pupils can

[Mrs Flick Drummond]

have a wider range of education. For example, giving those not doing art at GCSE or A-level the chance to continue this important subject can be of great benefit. The same applies to music, sport and many other subjects. I hope that teachers will be given more time during the day to mark books and plan lessons or continue their professional development, rather than spending evenings and weekends working.

The message is clear: teachers up and down the country have already risen to the challenge. If we give teachers and school leaders the freedom to deliver an excellent education, we will see a continual improvement in our country's education system. I welcome the White Paper and look forward to working with schools in Portsmouth to become an outstanding city for education.

6.11 pm

**Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): I would like to put on the record the fact that my partner is a school governor at St John's in Baxenden.

The point I want to raise is the negative impact that forced academisation will have on grant-maintained local authority nurseries. In an answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on 22 March, the Minister said—I summarise—that at some point in the future, the Government would think about whether state nurseries would be forced to become academies.

As of 4 March this year, there were 41,227 young pupils in grant-maintained nurseries at 406 nursery schools in England. Some authorities have very low numbers of such pupils in schools, and the plain fact is that small nurseries with small class sizes are not big enough to academise. Their size and nature mean that they cannot afford to procure central services themselves, so they are reliant on the local education authority. This ideological shambles of forced academisation has resulted in the Government having to leave these nurseries out on a limb. Councils will still have to retain core educational support services.

What comes next for these local authority nurseries? In the meantime, with an uncertain future, they are unable to plan. The Government have injected a huge degree of instability. The all-party parliamentary group on nursery schools and nursery classes reported last month that there is growing evidence that the maintained nursery schools in particular are at risk of closure.

We must remember the important difference between primary education and early years childcare. Early years childcare is a multi-agency environment. Many of these nurseries are already losing co-located services and income because of this Government's policies. The outrageous cut of £685 million from Lancashire county council has resulted in one of my local authority nurseries, Fairfield, losing the presence and shared cost base of its neighbourhood centre, as the county council consolidates and contracts these services.

It is not just damaging cuts and forced academisation that threaten these LEA nurseries, because the Government's shambolic unplanned provision for increases in free childcare has also created problems. The net result is chaos for the UK's two, three and four-year-olds and their parents. According to the House of Commons Library, in Bristol alone, 23.2% of three and four-year-olds

attend LEA nurseries, while in my own county of Lancashire, 15.3% of three and four-year olds attend them. Let us not forget that parental choice is about choosing high-quality, state-provided nurseries. Local education provision is important to parents, who want fully qualified staff and support services. The reality today is that this Government have no answer to the forced academisation programme, and grant-maintained nurseries are going to suffer as a consequence.

6.14 pm

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): I welcome the White Paper and the broad thrust of policy, which is about standards. If England were a school, it would not be "outstanding" and it would not be "good", and that is not good enough. We owe it to our children to raise education standards across the board, especially in the most disadvantaged areas.

However, while I certainly see a role for academies in transforming schools that are failing, I have many reservations about the specific proposal for enforced academisation, and like many other Members, I have particular reservations in relation to rural primary schools. I recently visited All Saints Primary School in Lawshall, near Bury St Edmunds. Its excellent headmistress, Clare Lamb, is a national leader. The school is outstanding in every sense of the word, and it has told me that it does not want to become an academy. What I fundamentally struggle with—this is a very simple point—is the idea that I should go to that school and say, "Although your school is outstanding, and all your staff are working brilliantly and delivering a fantastic education, we are now going to force you to become an academy."

I understand the reasoning behind this, and I understand the point about sustainability. The White Paper argues that as more and more schools become academies, it will become harder to sustain those that do not. However, it is forecast that only a third of primary schools will be academies by 2022; in other words, two thirds will not. There is an answer to the question of sustainability, which is fairer funding. I have written to all my local schools telling them I will campaign for fairer funding so that they can look forward to a better funded future. That has been our answer. We have never linked it to academies, and I was grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for confirming that there was no direct link.

During Prime Minister's Question Time, I asked the Prime Minister about the principles underlying consultation on fairer funding. In his answer, which I sent to all my local primary schools, he specifically stated that he would support small rural schools in sparsely populated areas, and made no mention of academisation.

I know that both the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have a passion for education, but many of us have serious reservations about enforcement. We believe in choice, and we find it hard to defend the idea that we should force schools that are good or outstanding to become academies. A one nation education policy involves a national funding framework. A one nation education policy transforms the worst schools, making them become academies in the hope that that will improve them. However, I do not think that, at its heart, such a policy should mean forcing schools that are already good or outstanding to change their status, thus putting at risk the excellent standards that they are delivering.

6.17 pm

**Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): May I begin by apologising to the Secretary of State? Owing to the reduced speaking time, I shall not be able to make my traditional pop at the Inspiration Trust. I am sure that there will be other opportunities in the future, but I wanted to put that on the record.

Like so many other Members on both sides of the House, and like so many parents and teachers up and down the country, I am baffled by the Government's policy of forced academisation. Normally, when assessing a new initiative in any policy area, I consider three key questions: what does the consultation say and what are the views of the key stakeholders, what is the evidence for and against the policy, and how will new institutions created by it be held to account?

The answers to those questions are usually quite long and complex, and that is especially true of education, because it is a complex topic and there are many different views, often strongly held. However, in the case of the policy of forced academisation, the answers are not long and complex; they are brutally short and simple. Consultation: none. Evidence: none. Accountability: none. How are we to take this policy seriously? This is the most significant reorganisation of education policy in the United Kingdom since the second world war, and it was not even mentioned in the Conservative party manifesto, written less than a year ago. Was that the result of a deliberate choice to keep it secret from the electorate, or was it made up on the hoof at some point in the last 11 months? Whichever it was, one thing is certain: it has no mandate whatsoever from the public of this country. The White Paper that sets out this policy contains no evidence section to support the proposals it makes. It simply omits that, replacing it with a few cherry-picked, one-off examples that support the policy. Perhaps that omission has been made because the evidence simply does not exist. The fact is that this is just another lurch in an incoherent and unthought-out series of zig-zags on how our children are educated.

Perhaps it is on the question of accountability that this whole policy really shows up the hypocrisy of this Government. We have heard again and again in recent days about how keen they are on "transparency". We have heard them many times talk about "choice" and "localism". Yet again this Government say all the right things but do the exact opposite.

The White Paper in effect begins the process of accelerating the handover of the entire state education system to a series of semi-private bodies that are completely unaccountable to parents or the communities in which they reside. Why? Because parents, teachers and communities will no longer have the right to representation on boards of governors. Therefore, I urge the Conservative Members to have the honesty and integrity to put paid to this White Paper. If you do want it, put it in your next general election manifesto and take it to the people—let them decide their children's future. See if they are as keen to have millions of pounds of public assets handed over to the private sector for next to nothing. No transparency. No choice. Another nail in the coffin of local democracy.

6.21 pm

**Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): Learning changes lives because it changes life chances and we all get only one chance at school. In 2010, Labour left this country

with one in three children unable to do basic maths or to read. That is a damning indictment of its 13 years of education policy. Therefore, it is incumbent on the Government to take steps to improve standards. How do we do that? We do it by changing structures. Structures beget better standards—Tony Blair said that. I am a passionate advocate of more freedoms for teachers and for schools. If we free up teachers from bureaucracy, box ticking and form filling, they will fly.

I helped to set up one of the first free schools, in Wembley in Brent, where we are seeing our teachers flourish and live out their passion for their subjects, free from bureaucracy and diktat. We are seeing our children's discipline and behaviour turn around. Therefore, I speak in favour of the White Paper, which represents the next logical step in the reforms that are radically improving and changing the life chances of children in this country.

I particularly welcome two key points. The first is the reforms of Ofsted. For too long, we have seen Ofsted expand its role and have a debilitating and pernicious effect on teachers. It is cited as one of the key reasons for leaving the profession. It provides an unfair and distorted image of a school. It is inconsistent and incoherent. The Trojan horse schools were rated as outstanding by Ofsted. It is clear, then, that reform of its remit is needed. I welcome the announcements in the White Paper to reduce its role and interference in schools.

Secondly, on academisation, it is important that schools are free to choose how they are run. Hampshire, in which my constituency is located, is performing well. The authority has an opportunity here. It can take advantage of that to become a MAT. It can outsource its services. This is a great opportunity to reform standards and schools, to change structures and to improve standards by allowing more collaboration, whether in CPD, teacher training, leadership training or back-office sourcing.

I therefore welcome this White Paper to improve children's life chances.

6.24 pm

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): It has been a fairly polarised debate on academies and community schools and whether one is right and the other wrong. The education system is complex and because of that we should not allow the debate to be so polarised; it should be a meaningful and deep debate. However, a number of the points raised need to be challenged, not least the point that was made by Conservative Back-Bench Members that when Labour left office one in three children left primary school unable to read and write. That claim has been made before by Conservative Members. The UK Statistics Authority has challenged that and said that it is not true. We need to make sure that that is put right. More than that, there has been a recommendation that the official record should be changed to reflect the facts.

The Local Government Association's meeting with the Secretary of State has been referred to. To hear the report from that meeting, anyone would believe that the LGA supported the Government's proposals, but nothing could be further from the truth. So, to provide a bit of balance in the debate, let me tell the Secretary of State exactly what the LGA is saying. It has stated:

"The wholesale removal of democratically elected councils from all aspects of local education, to be replaced by unelected and remote civil servants, has rightly raised serious questions about local needs and accountability".

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): My local council, Rochdale Council, has just passed a motion to say that it totally deplores the attempt to force academisation on our schools. It will not be the only council to do that. Would my hon. Friend like to comment on that?

**Jim McMahon:** Absolutely, but I shall just conclude the quote from the LGA, which went on to say that the Government's proposals

"will further weaken vital local voices in our schools."

There has been a debate about whether the point in the motion about the removal of parent governors is accurate, but I can tell the House that there are serious concerns about the intent of this Government when it comes to democracy and local accountability. When I wrote to the Secretary of State to ask whether the Department would intervene to prevent E-ACT academies from sacking their community governors and parent governors, she refused to intervene; she supported their right to do that. There will be schools up and down this country in which parents no longer have a right to sit at that table and make their voice heard. If that is not the Government's intent, why did the Secretary of State or the Minister not intervene and say that when they had the opportunity to do so?

Local areas are stepping up, and I commend the education and skills commission in Oldham for the work that it did, supported by Baroness Estelle Morris. The three MPs representing Oldham wrote to the Secretary of State to ask for a meeting to discuss the outcome of that work, which was genuinely about creating a family of education in Oldham involving parents, schools, governors, teachers and the community right across the spectrum of free schools, academies and community schools, but we have not even had a response. How can MPs in their constituencies have any faith in a further centralised education system in which a Secretary of State has all the power when she clearly does not even have the time to respond to a letter?

Ultimately, this is a trust issue. I do not believe that the Government are really interested in community voices or in teachers' voices. I actually do not believe that they are particularly interested in what happens to young people in Oldham. I am really questioning who they do listen to. I have very serious concerns about the academy sponsors and I want to know, as do the public, in whose interests this Government are working.

6.28 pm

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I am aware that there is a certain sense of irony, this being an education debate, that I am at the bottom of the pile again—probably the last person to speak from the Government side of the House—for speaking too much. However, Mr Speaker, thanks to your policy that all must have prizes, I shall get my two minutes, and I am delighted to have them. I am also conscious that, yet again, I am the kid who no one wants to sit with. [HON. MEMBERS: "Aah!"] I am delighted to speak in the debate. I also made a speech on education in the Budget debate, along similar lines to the one that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) delivered.

I welcome the White Paper. I have found much in it that will make our schools better, which I endorse and celebrate. The point has been made that if a local

education authority school is outstanding, why should it be forced to become an academy? I should like to put a counter-proposition to that point. My constituency has five secondary schools, but only one has a sixth form. As a result, sixth form children have to be bussed out for miles. That is very much an LEA principle that has been put in place. One of my outstanding schools, which has not asked to become an academy, has asked to expand to include a sixth form but it has been unable to do so. Sometimes in order to encourage schools to use autonomy and to acquire their rights, we almost have to impose that will on them in order for them to take those powers. It is not just a question of whether the change is right for schools. There are parents who want their children to attend an outstanding sixth form in my constituency. If a school becomes an academy, there will be a sixth form and there will be more choice. Choice drives up standards, which is key for me as a constituency MP and a parent.

Having transformed a failing school, a headteacher in my constituency has now moved to another school at which the LEA may require some changes that she does not want. Such changes may help other schools, but there will be an impact on that headteacher, who moved to the new school to take it from good to outstanding. Would she have the right to run the school how she wanted were it an academy?

The White Paper shows the areas where teachers are a long way from their teacher training provider and Bexhill and Battle is at the bottom of the pile, so any chance of reform that leads to better locations for teacher training is to be welcomed. While my contribution is about parts of the White Paper, many parts that have been ignored today will be welcome and will drive up standards.

6.31 pm

**Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): Like many Opposition Members, I am proud of the record of the previous Labour Government and particularly proud of what we did on the academies programme. We went into many struggling schools that were finding it difficult to attract the right staff and made them attractive for new people, but I see nothing in the Government's approach that builds on that. They are butchering the Labour Government's record on academies, and they are wrong to claim that the changes are an extension of what the Labour Government did.

I am pleased to say that virtually all Opposition Members have recognised in today's debate that there is a huge number of good academies, because we are not here to say that academies are a mistake. Chesterfield has several academies. Newbold Community School was taken over by Outwood Grange, which I have visited and in many ways is doing a good job, as are the many schools under local authority control. Our argument today is not anti-academy, but anti the Government's dogmatic approach to forcing good schools that are working well under local authorities to become academies.

I take issue with the Government's amendment where it states that

"it trusts school leaders to run schools and empowers them with the freedom to innovate",

because many academies are parts of chains that operate in exactly the same way in many areas. Outwood Grange has 13 different schools, and the schools are run identically

in Scunthorpe, Worksop or Chesterfield. I put it to the organisation that that represents the “McDonaldisation” of education; it did not disagree and said that every one of its schools is exactly the same. The idea that headteachers have all the power in academies does not necessarily stand up to much scrutiny. The Government’s rigid approach to the national curriculum prevents local headteachers from innovating, so the Government’s record does not back up what they are saying.

It is clear from today’s debate that the Government do not have the support of their own Members, who are right to worry about the impact on small rural primary schools, because there is no way that academy chains will be interested in taking over such schools, which will close. I have no doubt that the policy will collapse, and it is massively disruptive for schools to have this hanging over them. By far the best thing that the Secretary of State could do is not to carry on clinging to a policy that we can all see has no chance of being delivered, but to announce at the Dispatch Box that she will rethink and get everyone concentrating on the key issues that face our schools, not this forced academisation.

6.34 pm

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): As a teacher, parent and experienced school governor, I know that giving children access to an excellent education is the best start that we can give them in life, so it is a shame that the Government have not come to us with a serious plan to improve educational standards. The proposal before us is nothing more than a gimmick. There is no evidence whatsoever that academies consistently raise standards. The fact is that educational standards rise and children succeed when they experience excellent teaching, and the evidence shows that it matters not whether that takes place in a local authority or an academy. The Government are choosing to ignore the evidence and are riding roughshod over both public and professional opinion.

The proposed changes are not just unhelpful; they are downright damaging. Some 85% of all primary schools are already judged to be outstanding, so why are they now to be forced to become academies? What is this expensive top-down reconfiguration going to cost? School budgets face a real-terms cut for the first time since the mid-1990s, so why, when schools are facing such huge challenges, are we asking teachers to take time, money and effort away to implement a change that has no track record of success? If the Government come forward with a genuine plan to raise educational standards by ensuring that schools are properly resourced and teachers are properly supported, I will back it, but I will not be backing this irresponsible meddling.

In my constituency, 35 state-maintained schools stand to be affected, and hundreds of parents, governors and teachers have already written to me to oppose the Government’s proposals, which fly totally in the face of localism. Where is the democracy in this proposal? Where is the accountability? Why are parents to be excluded from the governance of their children’s schools? Why are the views of the professionals—the teachers—being ignored? I will stand up for the parents of Burnley and Padiham, I will stand up for teachers and governors, but above all I will be opposing the forced academisation of our schools, because I care passionately about the education of our children.

6.36 pm

**Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Schools in Salford are under immense strain: there are chronic shortages of teachers; class sizes are rising; and the extra-curricular services, such as mentoring, which can often mean the difference between a child from a disadvantaged background succeeding or failing, are being scaled back. With all the Chancellor’s rhetoric about the northern powerhouse, now is the time to raise standards and to skill our region for the future, not to take money and effort away from education by undertaking an extremely costly and unnecessary programme to convert all schools into academies.

I am also concerned that the Government appear to be undertaking such a policy with no evidential basis to show that academies are more effective than maintained schools. Even the Local Government Association education chair, Roy Perry, has stated that

“only 15% of the largest academy chains perform above the national average”.

Furthermore, schools should be rooted in and accountable to their local communities, but the Government’s proposals create quite the opposite, taking schools away from local authority control and removing the express requirement to install parent governors. That is quite contradictory from a Government who only a few years ago championed localism.

Let me turn now to the treatment of land assets, which many describe as a land grab reminiscent of the dissolution of the monasteries. The new plans will see all school land transferred directly from local authorities to the Secretary of State, who will then grant a lease to the relevant academy. The Minister may recall that back in 2010 the primary care trust land was transferred to a property management company, NHS Property Services Ltd, with the sole shareholder being the Secretary of State for Health. I have questioned the necessity of creating such a company when the Secretary of State holds the land in any case, but it would of course make perfect sense if there was, say, a proposed sale of that property management company in the future—I say no more. I would be grateful if the Minister confirmed today whether such a property management company would be created for land held under the Government’s proposals.

As for the leases themselves, details do not appear to be available at the moment, so I would be grateful if the Minister could provide clarity. Most importantly, will an academy tenant be required to seek consent from the Secretary of State for any underlettings? Will there be any degree of local engagement to ensure that any tenants are deemed beneficial to the school and the wider community, rather than simply offering a financial gain for the academy?

On future land sales, I am very concerned about how this system will be managed by the Secretary of State, particularly in respect of who will derive benefit from any proceeds of sale. The current proposals are extremely ambiguous and do not clarify where proceeds will be directed, but I suggest that they go to the relevant local authority so that they can be put to good and beneficial local use.

6.39 pm

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): I declare an interest as a councillor in the London borough of Redbridge, a borough that has a high level of retention of schools as

[*Wes Streeting*]

part of the local authority family, and also an excellent and constructive relationship with the free schools, academies, grammar schools and independent schools that make up the rich diversity of education in our borough.

This Government have got their priorities on education very badly wrong. When they should be focusing on school standards, they are focusing on structures, without any focus whatsoever on evidence. It has been striking that so few Government Members have stood up in support of the Government's proposals. We have heard many excellent speeches against those proposals and against the outrageous attack on parent choice and voice. I will not single them out, because being called a red Tory is a cross that no one should have to bear.

The Secretary of State should have been at the Dispatch Box today talking about the first real-terms cut in school budgets since the 1990s. She should have been talking about how she is going to deal with the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention that is seeing many excellent teachers leave the profession because of the stress of their workload and also because of the offence caused by people in this place and in Whitehall continuing to tell professionals how to do their job.

Our job is to make sure that every child gets the best start in life, and to ensure that the accountability mechanisms are in place to assure ourselves that that is the case, and, if it is not, to intervene. What justification can there be for the fact that the majority of schools that will be affected by the policy are primary schools, more than 80% of which are already good or outstanding? Why are we focusing on excellence when we should be focusing on underperformance?

Why is the Secretary of State not taking advice from her own chief inspector of schools who, after an inspection of seven multi-academy trusts, highlighted serious weaknesses, sometimes the same as in the worst performing local authorities and often accompanied by the same excuses? Conversion to academies and placing schools in the hands of multi-academy trusts is not a panacea or a magic wand. We should follow the evidence when setting education policy.

That is my fundamental problem with the White Paper—it does not follow the evidence. There is no evidence that making a school an academy will somehow make it better. Yes, we need more freedom for schools and more trust in professionals. We need to follow the example that we saw under the Labour Government. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) said, I am proud of what the Labour Government delivered on education. I am a product of it. I went to school in London when London schools were left to sink. Instead, we had the London Challenge, Excellence in Cities and a raft of measures that came through funding and also through focus on outstanding teaching and outstanding leadership. That is what the Secretary of State should be talking about today. Instead, she has a dogmatic, ridiculous White Paper that will not deliver what she says it will.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Rachael Maskell to speak until 6.44.

6.42 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for squeezing me in, Mr Speaker. I want to talk about the excellence that has been built in York's education

system—a partnership between the local authority schools and the local authority itself. It is an excellence recognised by this Government—it is a top performing local authority across Yorkshire and Humber and has the top 14% of GCSE results in the city. The Government have recognised it to pilot its childcare strategy.

That excellence, which is threatened by this policy, has been built on the close partnership, the interdependence and collaboration between the local authority and local schools. It is those schools that are saying, "Leave me alone." There is a strong relationship between parents and their school, and that partnership makes things work. Standards in education in York have been built up over decades. It is a fantastic story of triumph and it does not stop there. The York Challenge is modelled on the success of the London and Greater Manchester Challenges, to drive that excellence in partnerships between schools, the local education authority and parents.

One MAT has been created in York. The schools involved said that they had jumped before they were pushed because they were offered £100,000. It has fundamentally changed the relationship between the parents and the schools. It has also meant that the head did not have time to sign off the reports for the children, and that more teachers have moved into admin and headship roles, away from direct input in children's education, leading to more irregular classroom cover. What I would say to the Secretary of State is, "Don't break what doesn't need fixing."

6.44 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Let me start by declaring an interest as a lifelong member of the National Union of Teachers and a former teacher and college principal—I am not sure whether or not it is a benefit in this debate to have led a high-performing educational institution. This has been an excellent debate, begun from the Back Benches by the Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), who pointed out in a very able contribution that the Government are making a big mistake and asked them to think again.

My hon. Friends spelled out the need to think again. We heard contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson), for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), for Bradford West (Naz Shah), for Hyndburn (Graham Jones), for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins), for Burnley (Julie Cooper), for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and for York Central (Rachael Maskell). We also heard extremely positive contributions from the hon. Members for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), for Southport (John Pugh), for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), for Gloucester (Richard Graham), for Solihull (Julian Knight) and for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond).

I would like to draw particular attention to the concerns expressed carefully, and quite properly, by Government Members. Concerns about removing choice and forcing academisation were expressed by the hon. Members for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), for South Dorset (Richard Drax), for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) and for South Suffolk (James Cartledge). The hon. Member for South Suffolk also expressed concern

about the independence of small primary schools, as did the hon. Members for Newbury (Richard Benyon), for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), for Telford (Lucy Allan) and for Solihull. The hon. Members for Winchester (Steve Brine), for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) asked why, if something is broken in Hampshire, can the schools not stick with the local authority? I think that the Secretary of State indicated that there might be a concession to allow local authorities to form a multi-academy trust. If that is the case, it should be welcomed.

**Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab):** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Nic Dakin:** I am going to make some progress.

I thought that the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) made a really excellent speech. He made it clear that there is no evidence that academies are always better and expressed the fear, which many of us genuinely feel, that this may prove to be an unnecessary shake-up. He was complimented on that argument by his colleague the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman).

The big question that everybody is asking is: why? Why force every school to become an academy? Why remove the historical partnership between local communities and their schools by saying that schools can no longer choose to remain in local authority families? Why remove the right of parents to be elected by their peers to serve on their child's school's governing body, as is clearly proposed in paragraph 3.3 of the White Paper? I listened very carefully, but no credible answer has yet come forth, and there has been no evidence to support the huge upheaval that this forced academisation represents.

It is not as though those working in education do not have challenges to focus their energies on, such as teacher shortages, inadequate school place planning, managing the chaos of initiatives on exams and assessment being imposed on schools, or managing the first real-terms cuts in schools funding since the mid-1990s, with the need to make around £7.5 billion of savings. With limited resources, one might think that a Conservative Government would focus their energies on these very real issues.

I think that the Bow Group put it well:

“The proposed changes to schools follow a worrying trend in recent years to further centralise decisions away from local communities, which have more nuanced understanding of the issues they face daily. This adds to an ongoing ideological drift between the Party and conservative values.”

The leaders of the four largest groups on the Local Government Association are right to point out that 82% of local authority schools are good or outstanding, adding that there

“is no clear evidence that academies perform better than council maintained schools.”

That echoes the conclusion that the cross-party Education Committee came to after its in-depth inquiry into the matter. The National Association of Head Teachers is right to warn that

“the proposals present a particularly high risk to the future viability and identity of small, rural schools, nurseries and special schools.”

The professional associations are right to point out in their joint letter that a

“forcible transfer of 17,000 schools to academy status... will be a huge distraction from schools' core functions of teaching and

learning... This is not what parents want from their schools, nor was this a proposal part of the manifesto that the current government put before the electorate.”

That is from the leaders of the Local Government Association's leading groups. Evidence that they are right can be seen in the angry reaction of parents on Mumsnet to the suggestion that schools should be forced to become academies, whether or not that is needed or the school community and parents want it.

Her Majesty's chief inspector has recently written to the Secretary of State to raise serious concerns about the performance of seven large multi-academy trusts:

“Given these worrying findings about the performance of disadvantaged pupils and the lack of leadership capacity and strategic oversight by trustees, salary levels for the chief executives of some of these MATs do not appear to be commensurate with the level of performance of their trusts or constituent academies. This poor use of public money is compounded by some trusts holding very large cash reserves that are not being spent on raising standards.”

It is no wonder 146,000 people have already signed a petition calling on the Government to stop going down this road.

“Schools Week” asked a pertinent question: what will forced academisation mean for pupils? It came up with a perceptive answer: “Almost nothing.” However, there will be an impact on children and parents. School leaders will have to put scarce energy and money into researching and managing academisation. An additional £1.3 billion will be spent on the process, which is money that could be directly spent on children in our schools. Time and money that should be spent tackling the real problems facing schools—managing cuts in funding, recruiting and maintaining the education workforce, and providing sufficient school places—will be spent on managing a process of structural change. However, it is worse than that. There is not the capacity in the system to support wholesale academisation. There are already insufficient potential sponsors to give schools that need or want to become academies a choice.

The regional schools directors charged with ensuring school improvement will be distracted from focusing on that as they marshal capacity for wholesale academisation—a capacity that might well include expanding already-failing academy chains, which was something the Secretary of State failed to rule out when pressed to do so by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) in the Budget debate. We have a strategy that would deliver the ideological outcome of forced academisation but do nothing to improve outcomes for the UK's children or UK plc.

I hope all right hon. and hon. Members who believe that such massive changes to our school system should go ahead only if the evidence is in place to support them will vote for the motion on the Order Paper if they are not convinced that the time, money and energy that will be spent on forced academisation will improve outcomes for children, families and communities.

6.52 pm

**The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb):** This has been an excellent debate, with a large number of superb speeches. I apologise if, in the time available, I am not able to respond to them all.

[Mr Nick Gibb]

The Government's education policy is focused on raising academic standards in our schools. Many Governments promise to raise standards; this Government are raising standards. We are raising standards in children's reading, with 120,000 more six-year-olds this year reading more effectively as a result of our focus on phonics. We are raising standards in maths, with a new primary maths curriculum that is raising expectations and bringing us closer to the expectations in the top-performing education systems of the world. We are raising standards so that pupils leave primary school fluent in arithmetic. The plan is for all pupils to know their times tables by heart, which is why we are introducing a multiplication tables test at the end of primary school. Our policy is resulting in children starting secondary school having learned the rules of grammar and punctuation for the first time in a generation. The Government have eradicated grade inflation in our public exams—the GCSE and the A-level—which are being reformed so that they are on a par with the best qualifications in the world.

What the Government are doing in education is real; that is why it is controversial. It started under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), and it is now entering a bold new phase under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the current Secretary of State.

If real education reform were easy, it would have been done already. However, every step of the way, we have had to fight and take on the vested interests—the self-appointed experts, the professors of education in the universities and the education quangos. We have challenged local authorities where too many schools were languishing in the performance tables year after year. We have transformed many of their schools into academies with a strong sponsor driving up standards—1,300 schools so far since 2010. We have taken powers in the Education and Adoption Act 2016 to automatically turn into an academy every school that Ofsted has put into special measures and to do the same for every coasting school that is not up to the job of raising its game.

Those schools will be supported by outstanding schools that are leading multi-academy trusts, which are formal groupings of academies spreading what works in the best schools to improve pupil behaviour, raise academic standards, promote sport and the arts, and share back-office functions. That means that small schools are more likely to be financially viable. There are now more than 640 multi-academy trusts led by outstanding schools.

Many strong and effective local authorities have seen the educational benefit of giving professionals control of their schools and have encouraged their good and outstanding schools to become academies and spread their winning formula and expertise. For example, in Bournemouth, 87% of all local authority schools, including primary schools, are now academies, as are 83% of schools in Bromley. Nationally, 66% of secondary schools and 19% of primary schools are now academies.

In 2010, there were just 203 academies; now, there are more than 5,600. The direction of travel is clear. Every month, more and more schools are converting to academy status. At some point, we have to draw the line, and that is why the White Paper sets out what we need to do over the next six years as more local authorities reach the levels of academisation in Bournemouth, Bromley and elsewhere.

Local authorities will continue to have an important role to play as the champions of parents and pupils—  
[Interruption.]

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. Many people asked questions of the Minister. They want to hear his answers. We must listen to the debate.

**Mr Gibb:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, local authorities have a role to play as the champions of parents and pupils with regard to place planning, administering admissions and ensuring that children with special educational needs are properly supported in their education.

May I apologise to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) for the occasional split infinitive in the White Paper? There were many more split infinitives in the earlier drafts. The Secretary of State and I have done our best to eradicate jargon, and we will redouble our efforts to do so.

Despite those split infinitives, my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) read an excerpt from a letter from a headteacher in her constituency, stating that it is the best White Paper he has ever read. She was right to point out that, in her experience, there is enormous community involvement in the academies in her constituency. We are putting greater expectations on academies to involve parents and to take their views into account.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), who chairs the Education Committee, made the important point in his excellent contribution that, of course, the academies programme started under Labour—but that was new Labour, not old Labour—and this Government have turbo-charged that programme.

This has been a lively debate about an issue that could not be more important to our country: the education of the next generation. This Government have a clear plan for education reform and it is already raising standards in our schools. By contrast, we hear nothing from Labour about standards, improving the teaching of reading, instilling a love of books, attainment in mathematics, improving our GCSE and A-level exams or improving pupil behaviour in our schools. For Labour, it is all about politics—it is all about cosyng up to the vested interests and the NUT.

Our White Paper is an ambitious plan to ensure that our school leavers, wherever they live and whatever their background, are properly educated and equipped for life in modern Britain. It is clear from today's debate that the Labour party has learned nothing from its defeat. It has no credibility on the economy, no ambition and no plan to raise standards in our schools, and at the first whiff of controversy it runs to attach itself to the vested interests.

The public want a Government who take difficult decisions and who act not in party interests, but in the national interest. I urge the House to reject Labour's self-serving motion and to support our amendment—

**Mr Alan Campbell** (Tynemouth) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

*Question put forthwith.* That the Question be now put.

*Question agreed to.*

*Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 302, Noes 204.*

**Division No. 236]**

**[7 pm**

**AYES**

Adams, Nigel	Davies, Glyn	Harrington, Richard	Morris, David
Afriyie, Adam	Davies, Dr James	Harris, Rebecca	Morris, James
Aldous, Peter	Davies, Mims	Hart, Simon	Morton, Wendy
Allan, Lucy	Davies, Philip	Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Mowat, David
Allen, Heidi	Davis, rh Mr David	Hayes, rh Mr John	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Amess, Sir David	Dinenage, Caroline	Heald, Sir Oliver	Murrison, Dr Andrew
Andrew, Stuart	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Heapey, James	Neill, Robert
Ansell, Caroline	Dodds, rh Mr Nigel	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Newton, Sarah
Argar, Edward	Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.	Henderson, Gordon	Nokes, Caroline
Atkins, Victoria	Donelan, Michelle	Herbert, rh Nick	Norman, Jesse
Bacon, Mr Richard	Double, Steve	Hinds, Damian	Nuttall, Mr David
Baker, Mr Steve	Dowden, Oliver	Hoare, Simon	Offord, Dr Matthew
Baldwin, Harriett	Drax, Richard	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Opperman, Guy
Barclay, Stephen	Drummond, Mrs Flick	Holloway, Mr Adam	Parish, Neil
Baron, Mr John	Duddridge, James	Hopkins, Kris	Patel, rh Priti
Barwell, Gavin	Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Howarth, Sir Gerald	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Bebb, Guto	Ellis, Michael	Howell, John	Pawsey, Mark
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Ellison, Jane	Howlett, Ben	Penning, rh Mike
Benyon, Richard	Ellwood, Mr Tobias	Huddleston, Nigel	Penrose, John
Beresford, Sir Paul	Elphicke, Charlie	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Perry, Claire
Berry, Jake	Eustice, George	Jackson, Mr Stewart	Phillips, Stephen
Berry, James	Evans, Graham	James, Margot	Philp, Chris
Bingham, Andrew	Evans, Mr Nigel	Javid, rh Sajid	Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Blackman, Bob	Evennett, rh Mr David	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Pincher, Christopher
Blackwood, Nicola	Fabricant, Michael	Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Poulter, Dr Daniel
Blunt, Crispin	Fallon, rh Michael	Jenkyns, Andrea	Pow, Rebecca
Boles, Nick	Fernandes, Suella	Jenrick, Robert	Prentis, Victoria
Bone, Mr Peter	Field, rh Mark	Johnson, Boris	Pritchard, Mark
Borwick, Victoria	Foster, Kevin	Johnson, Gareth	Pursglove, Tom
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Johnson, Joseph	Quin, Jeremy
Bradley, Karen	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Jones, Andrew	Quince, Will
Brady, Mr Graham	Frazer, Lucy	Jones, rh Mr David	Raab, Mr Dominic
Brazier, Mr Julian	Freeman, George	Jones, Mr Marcus	Redwood, rh John
Bridgen, Andrew	Freer, Mike	Kawczynski, Daniel	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Brine, Steve	Fuller, Richard	Kennedy, Seema	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Brokenshire, rh James	Fysh, Marcus	Kirby, Simon	Robinson, Mary
Bruce, Fiona	Gale, Sir Roger	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Rosindell, Andrew
Buckland, Robert	Garnier, rh Sir Edward	Knight, Julian	Rudd, rh Amber
Burns, Conor	Garnier, Mark	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Rutley, David
Burns, rh Sir Simon	Gauke, Mr David	Lancaster, Mark	Sandbach, Antoinette
Burrowes, Mr David	Ghani, Nusrat	Lee, Dr Phillip	Scully, Paul
Burt, rh Alistair	Gibb, Mr Nick	Leigh, Sir Edward	Selous, Andrew
Cairns, rh Alun	Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl	Leslie, Charlotte	Shapps, rh Grant
Carmichael, Neil	Glen, John	Lewis, Brandon	Sharma, Alok
Cartledge, James	Goodwill, Mr Robert	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Cash, Sir William	Gove, rh Michael	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Skidmore, Chris
Caulfield, Maria	Graham, Richard	Lidington, rh Mr David	Smith, Chloe
Chalk, Alex	Grant, Mrs Helen	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Smith, Henry
Chishti, Rehman	Gray, Mr James	Lord, Jonathan	Smith, Julian
Chope, Mr Christopher	Grayling, rh Chris	Loughton, Tim	Smith, Royston
Churchill, Jo	Green, Chris	Lumley, Karen	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Clark, rh Greg	Green, rh Damian	Mackinlay, Craig	Solloway, Amanda
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Greening, rh Justine	Mackintosh, David	Soubry, rh Anna
Cleverly, James	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Main, Mrs Anne	Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Griffiths, Andrew	Mak, Mr Alan	Spencer, Mark
Collins, Damian	Gummer, Ben	Malthouse, Kit	Stephenson, Andrew
Colvile, Oliver	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Mathias, Dr Tania	Stevenson, John
Costa, Alberto	Halfon, rh Robert	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Stewart, Bob
Cox, Mr Geoffrey	Hall, Luke	Maynard, Paul	Stewart, Iain
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hammond, Stephen	McCartney, Karl	Stewart, Rory
Davies, Byron	Hancock, rh Matthew	McPartland, Stephen	Streeter, Mr Gary
Davies, Chris	Hands, rh Greg	Menzies, Mark	Stride, Mel
Davies, David T. C.	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Mercer, Johnny	Sturdy, Julian
		Merriman, Huw	Sunak, Rishi
		Gummer, Ben	Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
		Milling, Amanda	Syms, Mr Robert
		Mills, Nigel	Thomas, Derek
		Milton, rh Anne	Throup, Maggie
		Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Timpson, Edward
		Mordaunt, Penny	Tolhurst, Kelly
		Morgan, rh Nicky	Tomlinson, Justin
		Morris, Anne Marie	Tomlinson, Michael

Tracey, Craig  
Tredinnick, David  
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
Truss, rh Elizabeth  
Tugendhat, Tom  
Turner, Mr Andrew  
Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
Vaizey, Mr Edward  
Vara, Mr Shailesh  
Vickers, Martin  
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
Walker, Mr Charles  
Walker, Mr Robin  
Wallace, Mr Ben  
Warburton, David  
Warman, Matt  
Watkinson, Dame Angela  
Wharton, James

Whately, Helen  
Wheeler, Heather  
White, Chris  
Whittaker, Craig  
Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
Wiggin, Bill  
Williams, Craig  
Williamson, rh Gavin  
Wilson, Mr Rob  
Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
Wood, Mike  
Wragg, William  
Wright, rh Jeremy  
Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Jackie Doyle-Price and**  
**George Hollingbery**

### NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane  
Abrahams, Debbie  
Alexander, Heidi  
Ali, Rushanara  
Allen, Mr Graham  
Anderson, Mr David  
Ashworth, Jonathan  
Bailey, Mr Adrian  
Barron, rh Kevin  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Berger, Luciana  
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
Blenkinsop, Tom  
Blomfield, Paul  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brake, rh Tom  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brown, Lyn  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bryant, Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burden, Richard  
Burgon, Richard  
Burnham, rh Andy  
Butler, Dawn  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Champion, Sarah  
Coaker, Vernon  
Coffey, Ann  
Cooper, Julie  
Cooper, Rosie  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Cox, Jo  
Coyle, Neil  
Crausby, Mr David  
Creasy, Stella  
Cummins, Judith  
Cunningham, Alex  
Cunningham, Mr Jim  
Dakin, Nic  
Danczuk, Simon  
David, Wayne  
Davies, Geraint  
Doughty, Stephen  
Dowd, Jim  
Dowd, Peter

Dromey, Jack  
Dugher, Michael  
Durkan, Mark  
Eagle, Ms Angela  
Eagle, Maria  
Edwards, Jonathan  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Elliott, Tom  
Ellman, Mrs Louise  
Esterson, Bill  
Farrelly, Paul  
Field, rh Frank  
Fitzpatrick, Jim  
Fleelo, Robert  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Flint, rh Caroline  
Flynn, Paul  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Glass, Pat  
Glindon, Mary  
Godsiff, Mr Roger  
Goodman, Helen  
Green, Kate  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Griffith, Nia  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Hanson, rh Mr David  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hayes, Helen  
Healey, rh John  
Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
Hillier, Meg  
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hoey, Kate  
Hollern, Kate  
Hopkins, Kelvin  
Howarth, rh Mr George  
Huq, Dr Rupa  
Jarvis, Dan  
Johnson, rh Alan  
Johnson, Diana  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, Graham  
Jones, Helen  
Jones, Susan Elan  
Kane, Mike  
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald  
Kendall, Liz

Kinnock, Stephen  
Kyle, Peter  
Lamb, rh Norman  
Lammy, rh Mr David  
Lavery, Ian  
Leslie, Chris  
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
Lewis, Clive  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Caroline  
Lucas, Ian C.  
Lynch, Holly  
Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
Mahmood, Shabana  
Malhotra, Seema  
Mann, John  
Marris, Rob  
Marsden, Mr Gordon  
Maskell, Rachael  
Matheson, Christian  
McCabe, Steve  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McCartney, Jason  
McDonagh, Siobhain  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonnell, John  
McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
McGinn, Conor  
McGovern, Alison  
McInnes, Liz  
McKinnell, Catherine  
McMahon, Jim  
Meale, Sir Alan  
Mearns, Ian  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Morden, Jessica  
Morris, Grahame M.  
Mulholland, Greg  
Nandy, Lisa  
Onn, Melanie  
Onwurah, Chi  
Osamor, Kate  
Owen, Albert  
Pearce, Teresa  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Perkins, Toby  
Phillips, Jess  
Pound, Stephen  
Powell, Lucy  
Pugh, John  
Qureshi, Yasmin

Reed, Mr Steve  
Rees, Christina  
Reeves, Rachel  
Reynolds, Jonathan  
Rimmer, Marie  
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
Rotheram, Steve  
Ryan, rh Joan  
Saville Roberts, Liz  
Shah, Naz  
Sharma, Mr Virendra  
Sheerman, Mr Barry  
Sherriff, Paula  
Shuker, Mr Gavin  
Skinner, Mr Dennis  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smeeth, Ruth  
Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
Smith, Angela  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Nick  
Smith, Owen  
Smyth, Karin  
Spellar, rh Mr John  
Starmer, Keir  
Streeting, Wes  
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
Tami, Mark  
Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
Thornberry, Emily  
Timms, rh Stephen  
Trickett, Jon  
Turley, Anna  
Twigg, Derek  
Twigg, Stephen  
Umunna, Mr Chuka  
Vaz, rh Keith  
Vaz, Valerie  
Watson, Mr Tom  
West, Catherine  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Williams, Hywel  
Williams, Mr Mark  
Wilson, Phil  
Winnick, Mr David  
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
Woodcock, John  
Wright, Mr Iain  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Jeff Smith and**  
**Sue Hayman**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 201.*

### Division No. 237]

**[7.13 pm**

### AYES

Adams, Nigel  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Allen, Heidi  
Amess, Sir David  
Andrew, Stuart  
Argar, Edward  
Atkins, Victoria

Bacon, Mr Richard  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, Stephen  
Baron, Mr John  
Bebb, Guto  
Bellingham, Sir Henry  
Benyon, Richard  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, Jake

Berry, James	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Knight, Julian	Rosindell, Andrew
Bingham, Andrew	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Rudd, rh Amber
Blackman, Bob	Frazer, Lucy	Lancaster, Mark	Rutley, David
Blackwood, Nicola	Freeman, George	Lee, Dr Phillip	Sandbach, Antoinette
Blunt, Crispin	Freer, Mike	Leigh, Sir Edward	Scully, Paul
Boles, Nick	Fuller, Richard	Leslie, Charlotte	Selous, Andrew
Bone, Mr Peter	Fysh, Marcus	Lewis, Brandon	Shapps, rh Grant
Borwick, Victoria	Gale, Sir Roger	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Sharma, Alok
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Garnier, rh Sir Edward	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Bradley, Karen	Garnier, Mark	Lidington, rh Mr David	Skidmore, Chris
Brady, Mr Graham	Gauke, Mr David	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Smith, Chloe
Brazier, Mr Julian	Ghani, Nusrat	Lord, Jonathan	Smith, Henry
Bridgen, Andrew	Gibb, Mr Nick	Loughton, Tim	Smith, Julian
Brine, Steve	Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl	Lumley, Karen	Smith, Royston
Brokenshire, rh James	Glen, John	Mackinlay, Craig	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Bruce, Fiona	Goodwill, Mr Robert	Mackintosh, David	Solloway, Amanda
Buckland, Robert	Gove, rh Michael	Main, Mrs Anne	Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Burns, Conor	Graham, Richard	Mak, Mr Alan	Spencer, Mark
Burns, rh Sir Simon	Grant, Mrs Helen	Malthouse, Kit	Stephenson, Andrew
Burrowes, Mr David	Gray, Mr James	Mathias, Dr Tania	Stevenson, John
Burt, rh Alistair	Grayling, rh Chris	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Stewart, Bob
Cairns, rh Alun	Green, Chris	Maynard, Paul	Stewart, Iain
Carmichael, Neil	Green, rh Damian	McCartney, Karl	Stewart, Rory
Cartlidge, James	Greening, rh Justine	McPartland, Stephen	Streeter, Mr Gary
Cash, Sir William	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Menzies, Mark	Stride, Mel
Caulfield, Maria	Griffiths, Andrew	Mercer, Johnny	Sturdy, Julian
Chalk, Alex	Gummer, Ben	Merriman, Huw	Sunak, Rishi
Chishti, Rehman	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Metcalfe, Stephen	Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Chope, Mr Christopher	Halfon, rh Robert	Milling, Amanda	Syms, Mr Robert
Churchill, Jo	Hall, Luke	Mills, Nigel	Thomas, Derek
Clark, rh Greg	Hammond, Stephen	Milton, rh Anne	Throup, Maggie
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Hancock, rh Matthew	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Timpson, Edward
Cleverly, James	Hands, rh Greg	Mordaunt, Penny	Tolhurst, Kelly
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Morgan, rh Nicky	Tomlinson, Justin
Collins, Damian	Harrington, Richard	Morris, Anne Marie	Tomlinson, Michael
Colvile, Oliver	Harris, Rebecca	Morris, David	Tracey, Craig
Costa, Alberto	Hart, Simon	Morris, James	Tredinnick, David
Cox, Mr Geoffrey	Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Morton, Wendy	Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hayes, rh Mr John	Mowat, David	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Davies, Byron	Heald, Sir Oliver	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tugendhat, Tom
Davies, Chris	Heappey, James	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Turner, Mr Andrew
Davies, David T. C.	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Neill, Robert	Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Davies, Glyn	Henderson, Gordon	Newton, Sarah	Vaizey, Mr Edward
Davies, Dr James	Herbert, rh Nick	Nokes, Caroline	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Davies, Mims	Hinds, Damian	Norman, Jesse	Vickers, Martin
Davies, Philip	Hoare, Simon	Nuttall, Mr David	Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Davis, rh Mr David	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Offord, Dr Matthew	Walker, Mr Charles
Dinenage, Caroline	Holloway, Mr Adam	Opperman, Guy	Walker, Mr Robin
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel	Hopkins, Kris	Parish, Neil	Wallace, Mr Ben
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.	Howarth, Sir Gerald	Patel, rh Priti	Warburton, David
Donelan, Michelle	Howell, John	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Warman, Matt
Double, Steve	Howlett, Ben	Pawsey, Mark	Watkinson, Dame Angela
Dowden, Oliver	Huddleston, Nigel	Penning, rh Mike	Wharton, James
Drax, Richard	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Penrose, John	Whately, Helen
Drummond, Mrs Flick	James, Margot	Perry, Claire	Wheeler, Heather
Duddridge, James	Javid, rh Sajid	Phillips, Stephen	White, Chris
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Philp, Chris	Whittaker, Craig
Ellis, Michael	Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Pickles, rh Sir Eric	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Ellison, Jane	Jenkyns, Andrea	Pincher, Christopher	Wiggin, Bill
Ellwood, Mr Tobias	Jenrick, Robert	Poulter, Dr Daniel	Williams, Craig
Elphicke, Charlie	Johnson, Boris	Pow, Rebecca	Williamson, rh Gavin
Eustice, George	Johnson, Gareth	Prentis, Victoria	Wilson, Mr Rob
Evans, Graham	Johnson, Joseph	Pritchard, Mark	Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Evans, Mr Nigel	Jones, Andrew	Pursglove, Tom	Wood, Mike
Evennett, rh Mr David	Jones, rh Mr David	Quin, Jeremy	Wragg, William
Fabricant, Michael	Jones, Mr Marcus	Quince, Will	Wright, rh Jeremy
Fallon, rh Michael	Kawczynski, Daniel	Raab, Mr Dominic	Zahawi, Nadhim
Fernandes, Suella	Kennedy, Seema	Redwood, rh John	
Field, rh Mark	Kirby, Simon	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob	
Foster, Kevin	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Robertson, Mr Laurence	
		Robinson, Mary	

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Jackie Doyle-Price and**  
**George Hollingbery**

## NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Alexander, Heidi  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Allen, Mr Graham  
 Anderson, Mr David  
 Ashworth, Jonathan  
 Bailey, Mr Adrian  
 Barron, rh Kevin  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Berger, Luciana  
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
 Blenkinsop, Tom  
 Blomfield, Paul  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brake, rh Tom  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Brown, Lyn  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buck, Ms Karen  
 Burden, Richard  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burnham, rh Andy  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Coaker, Vernon  
 Coffey, Ann  
 Cooper, Julie  
 Cooper, Rosie  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Cox, Jo  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Crausby, Mr David  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Dakin, Nic  
 Danczuk, Simon  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Jim  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Dromey, Jack  
 Dugher, Michael  
 Durkan, Mark  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Elliott, Tom  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Field, rh Frank  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Ffello, Robert  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Flynn, Paul  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Glass, Pat  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Godsiff, Mr Roger  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Alan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Graham  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marris, Rob  
 Marsden, Mr Gordon  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 Meale, Sir Alan  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morris, Grahame M.  
 Mulholland, Greg  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Onn, Melanie

Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Pugh, John  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Marie  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Spellar, rh Mr John  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel  
**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Jeff Smith and**  
**Sue Hayman**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House believes that every child deserves an excellent education; welcomes the transformation in England's schools since 2010 where 1.4 million more children are now taught in good or outstanding schools; notes that the academies programme has been at the heart of that transformation because it trusts school leaders to run schools and empowers them with the freedom to innovate and drive up standards; further notes that there remain too many areas of underperformance and that more needs to be done to ensure that standards in England match those of its best international competitors; and therefore welcomes the Government's proposals in its White Paper to further improve teacher quality, ensure funding is fairly distributed, tackle areas of chronic educational failure and devolve more power to heads and school leaders to ensure both they and parents have more of a voice in the running of their schools; and welcomes the commitment to achieve educational excellence everywhere.

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### INSURANCE

That the draft Third Parties (Rights against Insurers) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 25 February, be approved.—(*Margot James.*)

*Question agreed to.*

### INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY

*Ordered,*

That the Motion in the name of Chris Grayling relating to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of

Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice has been given that the instrument be approved.—(*Margot James.*)

## PETITION

### Post office closures in Long Lawford and Bulkington

7.26 pm

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): I rise to present a petition relating to post office closures in Long Lawford and Bulkington, led by John Beaumont in Bulkington and Peter McLaren in Long Lawford, and signed by 1,551 individuals who request that the post offices remain open and that jobs are protected. The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage the Post Office and the Co-operative Society to reconsider the planned closure of post offices in Long Lawford and Bulkington.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the post office facilities in Long Lawford and Bulkington, run by the Post Office and the Co-operative Society, should not be closed; further that the closures would result in redundancies of current post office staff; and further that local petitions on this matter have been signed by 1551 individuals.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage the Post Office and the Co-operative Society to reconsider the planned closure of post offices in Long Lawford and Bulkington.

And the Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

[P001683]

## Economic Value of Golf

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Margot James.*)

7.27 pm

**Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): Two weeks ago, I was particularly pleased to have secured this Adjournment debate in the wake of the launch, hosted by the all-party group on golf, of which I am chairman, of a report by Professor Shibli at Sheffield Hallam University on the benefits to the UK economy of golf. The report was instigated and funded by the Royal and Ancient, the home of golf.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister is aware, and as maybe you are Madam Deputy Speaker, many facets of life depend on impeccable...timing. Indeed, all the sports that I regularly play, many representing parliamentary teams, rely on good co-ordination and timing. The report's launch and this Adjournment debate coincides with last weekend's exciting golf, where Danny Willett won the US Masters. Six of the top 15 players at the tournament were British. Perhaps they were told last weekend about the importance of this upcoming Adjournment debate and my starring role—although I think other factors may have provided any extra incentive they might have needed.

Our great sporting nation invented or codified practically every global sport—an amazing achievement. Golf is no different. Among the constant clatter and chatter of football, the hurly burly of rugby union or league and the more measured poise of cricket, golf stands out as a sport that can be played and enjoyed by all in our society. Indeed, there are about 3,000 golf clubs across the United Kingdom. No player can rely on his or her team mates, the decisions of a referee, or the noise from the home crowd. It is one man or woman against one course—that is all. Two foes fighting each other for control: the ultimate battle both physical and mental. I was recently informed that some view golf as a game played across a distance not of a course or a fairway, but of the five-and-a-half inches between the ears. It can be a sport as frustrating and rewarding as one wants it to be.

Among all the preamble, I mentioned the report that I was proud to help launch. The report, "A Satellite Account for Golf in the UK", shows explicitly the value, in a monetary sense, of golf to the UK economy. This debate will enable the House to recognise and celebrate golf's contribution on myriad levels, including economically and to the health of participants.

At this point, I would like to congratulate Martin Slumbers and all at the Royal and Ancient who supported the report, and Professor Shibli of Sheffield Hallam University Sport Industry Research Centre who produced it—the first of its kind for an individual sport in the UK.

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): I would like to congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate, and to acknowledge his work as part of the all-party group on golf. He raises an important point about economic value. Does he agree with me that there is a particular value to small business, as I well know round about St Andrews and elsewhere in North East Fife? He is also right to acknowledge the health benefits for people of all ages of taking part in golf.

**Karl McCartney:** I thank my colleague and fellow all-party group chairman for his welcome intervention.

I am aware that the Government have set five priorities in their “Sporting Future” strategy, one of which is economic development. When the results of the widely available report I referred to were published last month, it was clear that golf makes a vast contribution to our economy, much of which has been unheralded and unsung thus far. I trust this debate will go some way towards promulgating the good news.

The economic value is clear: with nearly 4 million people playing golf once a year and 1.5 million people playing golf every four weeks—a number even larger than those employed in the national health service—the total economic activity of golf exceeds a staggering £10 billion per annum.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I am glad that my hon. Friend has secured this debate. Although I cannot challenge St Andrews, Dorset has many fine golf courses. In terms of economic benefit, golf provides useful employment, especially for younger people living in a rural area. Does he agree that that is vital in our more rural areas?

**Karl McCartney:** Indeed it is, and I thank my hon. Friend for making the case for Dorset, as one of the many parts of the nation, both urban and rural, where golf is important. I shall come on to some of the statistics later in my speech.

Overall, golf’s positive contribution to the British economy is over £2 billion per annum, not just directly through golf clubs and through our vibrant golf equipment industry and golf shops, but indirectly through the construction and real estate industries.

I am particularly pleased that England Golf is the home of the amateur game in this country. It is based in my county of Lincolnshire in Woodhall Spa in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), so the game’s contribution is well spread across our nation. I doubt that even colleagues who want us to remain in the European Union could come up with a scare story about the damage that leaving might hypothetically do to this great game of ours—the Ryder cup is surely safe, no matter what happens on 23 June.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend and namesake on securing this debate. I have a family interest in that my dad and constituent Bob is a keen player at Meltham golf club in my constituency. In talking about the economic benefits, will my hon. Friend also acknowledge those in the clothing and equipment supply chains? Glenbrae Leisure in Slaithwaite, for example, makes lots of jumpers and leisure wear, and the cloth in the green jacket that Danny Willett wore in Augusta at the masters was woven and dyed in my constituency on the outskirts of Huddersfield.

**Karl McCartney:** I thank my good friend, distant relative and fellow all-party group officer for his interjection. He never fails to take the opportunity to make a good point in this Chamber.

The final piece of the economic jigsaw is the number of people who work in golf, with an estimated 75,000 people directly employed in the UK—the equivalent of

54,000 full time workers from Land’s End to John O’Groats. When the sport is on the world stage, as it will be at the Royal Troon for the British open in July of this year, the economic benefits for the local economy stretch far and wide. Even our friends from the north in Scotland must concede that the English have assisted in the promotion and healthy aspect of their tourism industry, where golf is concerned.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): As the Member who represents Royal Troon, in my maiden speech I paid tribute to it and welcomed people to come and attend the open in July. As I said, my house is not quite big enough, but my garden is quite big if people want to bring a tent. Anyone wanting advice on eateries, travel or anything else about Royal Troon is welcome to speak to me.

**Karl McCartney:** That is very kind of the hon. Lady. I am happy to have been able to tee that up, so that she could drive that intervention down the fairway! Sorry, everybody; I must stop it.

Of course, golf is not just about jobs and money, vital as these are. Golf is the fifth largest sport in the UK in terms of participation, and the health benefits are clear for so many who take part in it. If everyone played a round every week, perhaps the obesity problem we face in our country would soon be eradicated. No one can play golf without indulging in physical exertion. Indeed, the game has been described by some as a good walk interspersed with some elation and frustration, often in unequal measure. Golf is a sport that supports our Government’s aim of ensuring that the nation’s population are active. On average, a game of 18 holes involves walking about six miles, although I personally would disagree with that figure. Given my playing standard, I often find myself walking perhaps double that distance as I search for my balls in the rough off the fairway—often on both sides—and dig them out of bunkers. Some have remarked that I am lucky to have a soft touch in my short game.

More seriously, golf is a sport that supports participation by men and women across all age groups. It is not subject to the decline in participation in some sports, such as team sports, by people who have reached their early twenties. Golf participation rates tend to increase until people are in their thirties and remain steady until they retire. It is, indeed, a game for all.

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some excellent points. Does he agree that municipal golf courses are particularly important? Is it not disgraceful that my local council, Pendle borough council, is proposing to close the only municipal golf course in Pendle in order to save £50,000 a year? The same council, in the same month, spent £300,000 on the purchase of a disused building in another part of the borough, so it clearly has a lot of money and does not need to make that saving. It simply does not recognise the importance of golf to people in all age groups. This is a real sport in which everyone can get involved, and the borough should save our local golf course.

**Karl McCartney:** I thank my good friend and fellow traveller for his intervention, but unfortunately that is not the only example in the country. In my home area,

Wirral council, which is also Labour-controlled, will get rid of the municipal golf course if it has its way, and in Lewisham, one of the oldest courses—perhaps even the oldest—is also under threat.

**Dr Whitford:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Karl McCartney:** Very quickly, if that is OK.

**Dr Whitford:** In Troon, we are lucky enough to have 12,000 souls and nine golf courses, three of which are municipal. The hon. Gentleman spoke of people playing until retirement. In fact, golf is one of the few sports in which people can engage in their eighties and nineties. Our ladies' club certainly includes players who are well into their nineties. Such courses should not be got rid of.

**Karl McCartney:** I shall come on to some of the other options for people who want to play golf in their retirement.

All that shows why golf adds such value to our economy, to employment, to our environment, and to our public health. I felt that it was important to secure this debate because I wanted to ensure that golf received the recognition that it deserves, and also to build on the recent re-formation of the new all-party parliamentary group for golf—an important new step. For far too long, golf has only been recognised in both Houses by the Parliamentary Golf Society, an august and traditional body whose role, it seems to some, has been to help traditional parliamentarians to play 19 holes together rather than celebrating the positive impact of the game throughout the nation. Some of us who came up against that closed shop in the last Parliament decided to reinvigorate the APPG with the simple aim of promoting participation in golf across the ages and sexes. Our European neighbours see ladies' and girls' participation rates that are double ours in the UK, and we want to close that gap. Golf can be, and is, a game to be enjoyed by all the family.

The first priority of the APPG is participation, but hand in hand with that goes an aim that is just as important—the aim to change the perception of golf. This great sport is for all ages, and we want to encourage young girls and boys to try it, whatever their background and wherever they live, and to continue to play throughout their lives with their friends and families. Who knows? It may not be a further 20 years before we see another British winner of the US Masters.

Some great work has been done by England Golf and its new chief executive, Nick Pink, by the Golf Trust and by others. All four home unions have specific projects in inner-city areas, including the national Get Into Golf campaign and help for those with disabilities to take part in the sport. In the neighbouring constituency of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips), Lincoln Golf Centre recently launched a project to help people with dementia to play and continue to play golf, which is happily hosted by Brian Logan and supported by Anthony Blackburn, founder of Golf In Society. Before Easter I was invited to meet players and their families, friends and carers, some of whom enjoyed a morning of respite while their husbands, wives, friends or partners enjoyed some golf.

The end of April marks the start of national golf month, which I am sure the whole House will support. On Wednesday 27 April there will be an event on Speaker's Green to promote participation in golf. My right hon. Friend the Minister has been invited, and I am sure that you, Madam Deputy Speaker—as a member of the all-party parliamentary group—and all my colleagues throughout the House would enjoy taking part.

The conclusion of the report demonstrates that golf is of considerable importance to the economic contribution of sport within the UK economy.

**Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP):** I am interested in investment in golf tourism, and the results of that and of direct spending in constituencies. In my constituency, we have 30 courses. A £10,000 investment by Visit Scotland and the local council has led to almost £500,000 of indirect and direct revenues. Should we not be using this debate—I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree—to put pressure on tourist boards and local authorities to put more money into attracting golf visitors to the UK, because the bang for our buck there is clearly higher than it would be elsewhere?

**Karl McCartney:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I agree with virtually all the points he made. The many disparate and far-reaching organisations within golf need to work with those outside the sport to ensure that it achieves the participation level that it should, at various levels.

The conclusion of the report demonstrates that golf is of considerable importance to the economic contribution of sport in the UK economy. At the heart of the industry is a thriving club sector. However, the sport's presence in tourism, hospitality, construction, equipment, clothing, betting and events are all notable areas of golf's economic impact, as is its contribution to taxation.

The report provides a replicable economic baseline for the golf industry, against which the future development of the sport can be measured. With golf making its return to the Olympic Games at Rio later this year and the economy on an upward growth path, the economic and sporting conditions are favourable for the UK golf industry to develop further. So I am looking forward to hearing the response from my right hon. Friend the Minister, including his acceptance, I hope, of my invitation to him for a round of golf this summer at either Bexleyheath or Barnehurst golf clubs in his constituency, which have obviously noted his renowned sporting prowess.

I thank the House for its attention.

7.41 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr David Evennett):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karl McCartney) on securing the debate and on his constructive and interesting speech. I commend all those who have made interventions highlighting the golf courses in their constituency, and my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) for giving us some history about the jacket and the tweed involved. It is also good to see my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Heather Wheeler) in her seat. Before the debate, she highlighted the fact that I should mention the apprenticeships in her area and the green keepers and professionals in her golf clubs. We have had an interesting tour around the country and its golf courses.

[*Mr David Evennett*]

It is particularly timely that we consider the matter in the wake of a hugely successful Masters tournament for British golfers. I add my congratulations to Danny Willett, whose fantastic performance led him to his first Green Jacket—the first for a British golfer in 20 years. I also congratulate Lee Westwood, Paul Casey, Matthew Fitzpatrick and Justin Rose on finishing in the top 10—quite an achievement and what a result for our country.

I praise my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln for spearheading the recently formed all-party parliamentary group on golf. Its existence at Westminster is long overdue and I am sure the group will provide a strong voice for the sport in Parliament. The calling of this debate already shows that that voice is being heard, and we commend him. The new APPG is good news indeed for the sport. I wish it all success.

I agree with my hon. Friend that as MPs we should take an interest in the sport, whether we have golf courses in our constituencies, or we have people who are very interested in the sport and play elsewhere. Perhaps some people watch it just when there is an international competition. I thank him for his kind invitation to attend the APPG's first parliamentary reception in June. It is in the diary and I very much hope to be able to attend.

I should like to highlight the importance of golf to our nation's economy as well as to the health and wellbeing of all our citizens who participate. Today we have heard in particular about the economic value of golf. Indeed, Sheffield Hallam University's very helpful report has outlined how important the golfing sector is to our economy, and I commend its publication, which has stimulated considerable debate and interest. Its publication is timely as the Government's new strategy for sport cites economic development through sport as one of five high-level outcomes. It is important in our strategy for sport to ensure that more people participate at every age. We have heard that people can continue to play golf to a considerable age and that is commendable. We know from the report that the golf market is significant to the health of our economy, accounting for 14% of all consumer spending on sport and employing more than 74,000 people in the UK golf industry. Golfers spent £4.3 billion on their sport in 2014, and golf paid almost £1 billion in tax in that period. That is a really significant contribution to the nation's coffers.

Britain's historic association with the game reaps many economic benefits from overseas visitors, as has been mentioned. Many flock to our shores to see the world's best compete in the Open championship each year, while others come to play throughout the year on our world-famous courses, some of which have been highlighted this evening. Following the success of the 2014 Ryder cup at Gleneagles, the 2019 Solheim cup will also be played there, further cementing Scotland's reputation as the home of golf. This will also generate further economic benefit for the country, and broadcast and media coverage will highlight Scotland's natural beauty to the watching world. Speaking also as the Minister with responsibility for tourism, I welcome that opportunity.

I totally agree with my hon. Friend that to stimulate the economic benefits further, we need to increase the number of people playing the sport. Golf is already a

highly popular sport, with the latest Sport England survey showing that it is the fifth most played sport in England. It can be enjoyed by people of all ages, and participation has increased in the last year or so, which is welcome news. However, we must do all we can to increase participation further in golf, and in sport as a whole, for many reasons, not just the economic ones that we have already mentioned.

Sport England is investing £13 million in the current spending period on increasing participation through the England Golf Partnership, which is running a national campaign called "Get into Golf" to inspire people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to try the sport and to enjoy it. The campaign offers low-cost golf taster sessions and a range of courses for beginners and improvers. I have to tell my hon. Friend that I fear I would be an improver. I am pleased to say that more than 18,000 people took part in those sessions between April 2015 and September 2015, helping to take the sport to new participants.

In July 2014, England Golf also launched its new strategic plan, "Raising our Game", built around the key priorities of more players, stronger clubs, developing talent and putting on outstanding championships, thereby improving the image of the game and ensuring excellent governance. As part of the plan, a new club information pack has been produced to help clubs to market themselves better and bring new people to the game. England Golf has also worked with 50 targeted clubs on demand-led marketing workshops to help clubs to grow, and it has developed a two-year pilot programme in Northamptonshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire to get more people playing the game in those areas.

A new programme is also working with 100 clubs to increase the number of women golfers. Much is being done to improve the health of the sport, although we should always look to do more. I welcome the Royal and Ancient's decision last year to allow female members into the club. That has been a really long time coming, but I believe the decision will help the sport to move towards more balanced representation in the governance of the game. It will also be a positive step towards quashing the barriers within the sport. For golf to grow, it is vital that it demonstrates that it is an inclusive sport, open to all people of whatever background, age, race or gender. It is for everyone and, as we have heard this evening, people can participate at all levels.

It is important that we show that we are keen on the sport, and the inclusion of men's and women's golf at this summer's Olympic games in Rio will give golf a unique opportunity to access a global audience, encourage fresh blood into the game and increase economic growth for the sport sector. I was interested to learn that this will be the first time that golf has returned to the Olympics for 112 years, having last been played at the games in 1904, with men's and women's tournaments taking place. Golfing authorities believe that the sport's visibility will be greatly elevated by its inclusion in the Olympics, leading to greater participation. It was also announced earlier this month that gold medal winning golfers at the 2016 Olympics will win exemptions to next year's majors. The men's winner this summer will win entry to the Masters, the US Open, the Open, and the PGA Championship, which is really good news. The winning woman will also be given exemptions to the 2016 Evian Championship, the ANA Inspiration,

the Women's PGA Championship, the U.S. Women's Open and the Women's British Open. All of that will have a positive, enhancing effect on the game.

Sport England has worked with the England Golf Partnership to achieve a much clearer understanding of the market and to tackle some of the barriers that get in the way of more people playing golf: time, cost, and accessibility. The APPG's launch of national golf month at the Palace of Westminster on 27 April is a welcome boost, putting the spotlight on the sport and promoting the importance of golf to the UK's health and economy. We must also never forget the most important thing: golf is fun. Part of the Government strategy on sport is about getting more people involved in sport for health, social and recreational reasons, but also because it is fun. In addition to all those other things, sport can be fun. It is fun even when we lose, because participation is about enjoyment. In today's society, getting people going and doing things is fun in itself.

As I have mentioned, the economic impact of golf is important, but a 2009 study—it is a little out of date—of 300,000 Scandinavian golfers also estimated that those who play the game lived five years longer than non-players, regardless of age, gender or socioeconomic status.

**Michael Tomlinson:** Or ability.

**Mr Evennett:** Absolutely.

A further study found that walking 18 holes equates to moderate-to-high intensity exercise for older people and moderate exercise for the middle-aged—and that is

without the added bonus of playing the game. It is good news all round. Golf suits participants of all ages. It is good for communities and for jobs and presents an opportunity for people to do something different. I encourage as many people as possible to participate and to look to golf as an option for their entertainment, enjoyment and sport.

In conclusion, I am delighted to highlight the valuable contribution that golf makes to this country, enriching the lives and wellbeing of those who participate and work in the sector, and contributing to the economic health of the nation. Tonight's debate has been a welcome addition to the promotion of golf, encouraging participation and highlighting the work being done by so many excellent groups and organisations. Sport matters. It matters to this Government, to this House and to this country. Golf can play an important part in the Government's new sports strategy, which aims to encourage a more active and participatory nation. I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln for securing this debate today and thank those who have intervened and participated, because we want to get more people enjoying golf and working in the industry. I believe that that is the way to a successful sport. We want to see more great British stars winning on the international stage.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.53 pm

*House adjourned.*

## Deferred Division

### EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES, ETC.

That the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses (Amendment) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 25 February, be approved.

*The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 241.*

### Division No. 234]

#### AYES

Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Mr Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Cameron, rh Mr David  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Carswell, Mr Douglas  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian

Colvile, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Davies, Byron  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel  
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Elliott, Tom  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Gale, Sir Roger  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Gauke, Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian

Greening, rh Justine  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matthew  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, Sir Oliver  
 Heappey, James  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kinahan, Danny  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Lewis, Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Phillips, Stephen  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Daniel  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, Mr Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston

Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew

Vaizey, Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watkinson, Dame Angela  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wilson, Sammy  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Giindon, Mary  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Mr George

McGinn, Conor  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 McMahon, Jim  
 Meale, Sir Alan  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morris, Grahame M.  
 Mulholland, Greg  
 Mullin, Roger  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Nicolson, John  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Owen, Albert  
 Paterson, Steven  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy

#### NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina  
 Alexander, Heidi  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Allen, Mr Graham  
 Anderson, Mr David  
 Arkless, Richard  
 Ashworth, Jonathan  
 Austin, Ian  
 Bailey, Mr Adrian  
 Barron, rh Kevin  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Berger, Luciana  
 Black, Mhairi  
 Blackford, Ian  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
 Blenkinsop, Tom  
 Blomfield, Paul  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brake, rh Tom  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Brown, Alan  
 Brown, Lyn  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buck, Ms Karen  
 Burden, Richard  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burnham, rh Andy  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Chapman, Jenny

Cherry, Joanna  
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick  
 Clwyd, rh Ann  
 Coaker, Vernon  
 Coffey, Ann  
 Cooper, Julie  
 Cooper, Rosie  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Cowan, Ronnie  
 Cox, Jo  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Crausby, Mr David  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Dakin, Nic  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Durkan, Mark  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Fellows, Marion  
 Ferrier, Margaret  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Fiello, Robert  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Flynn, Paul

Hunt, Tristram  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Alan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Graham  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kerevan, George  
 Kerr, Calum  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lowell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marris, Rob  
 Marsden, Mr Gordon  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCaig, Callum  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair  
 McDonnell, John

Pugh, John  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Marie  
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
 Robertson, rh Angus  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Salmond, rh Alex  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Spellar, rh Mr John  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Michelle  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen

Trickett, Jon  
Turley, Anna  
Twigg, Derek  
Twigg, Stephen  
Umunna, Mr Chuka  
Vaz, rh Keith  
Vaz, Valerie

Watson, Mr Tom  
Weir, Mike  
West, Catherine  
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Williams, Hywel

Wilson, Corri  
Wilson, Phil  
Winnick, Mr David  
Winterton, rh Dame Rosie

Wishart, Pete  
Wright, Mr Iain  
Zeichner, Daniel

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

## Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 13 April 2016*

[VALERIE VAZ *in the Chair*]

### Private Members' Bills

9.30 am

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the procedure for debating and voting on Private Members' Bills.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I thank the good number of MPs who are present and who have expressed an interest in speaking. I also thank the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), who will be wrapping up for the Government and the Opposition respectively.

A debate on parliamentary procedure would not normally generate much interest outside this estate, but the level of interest may be rather different this morning, because many members of the public have become disillusioned with some of the things that we do in Parliament, and no more so than with the charade of those Fridays when we discuss private Members' Bills.

Some of the most progressive legislation by Parliament in recent decades has come through private Members' Bills: the suspension and then abolition of the death penalty, the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in 1967 and the Abortion Act 1967—all the result of private Members' Bills advanced by Back Benchers and given time by the Government. Between 1997 and 2015, however, across four Parliaments, of the 1,977 private Members' Bills introduced, only 103 became law. Since many of those were Government handout Bills, the number of private Members' Bills with which an individual Back-Bench Member was able to make a difference to law and society by bringing forward a Bill was tiny.

That is no surprise when we see what happens to private Members' Bills under the existing system; when a small number of MPs are present in Parliament to discuss Bills because MPs know there is only a very small chance of them being enacted; when Bills are talked out by an even smaller number of usually Conservative Members, whose only aim is to stop them being voted on; when serious Bills about serious issues are not given serious consideration or the chance to become law; and when most private Members' Bills do not get discussed at all and those that do rarely get a Second Reading vote. The system is broken.

The procedure for debating and voting on private Members' Bills is dishonest and misleading. It is an expensive and frustrating waste of time. What happens on Fridays in this place not only brings Parliament into disrepute, but feeds the cynicism that increasing numbers of people feel about politics and politicians. It does us no good service.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate on a really important issue, which I have personal experience of, with my High Cost Credit Bill in the previous Parliament. Does he agree that sorting the system out will contribute

significantly to rebalancing the relationship between Parliament and the Executive, and that one of the practical issues we need to look at is how to prioritise private Members' Bills according to their degree of support, as well as the possibility of using Tuesday evenings, to avoid conflict with constituency work on Fridays?

**Jeff Smith:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I will come to some of those issues shortly. He is right, which is why tackling the matter is important, as he says.

I will try to be brief, because a lot of Members who want to have a say are present, some of them with extensive experience of this issue, and because my suggestion is quite simple: if we want to do something in this place, let us do it properly. If we are going to allow a system in which Members may bring forward Bills, we should have a system that allows those Bills to be debated properly and voted on.

The Procedure Committee is looking at this issue, and I hope our debate will help to inform its deliberations. In its current review, the Committee has taken evidence from a whole range of people: the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House, Back-Bench Members, parliamentary officials, journalists, charities and the Hansard Society. When the Committee reports, I hope that this time the Government will act on the findings, because as hon. Members might know, the Procedure Committee also discussed the issue in the last Parliament. The Committee accepted that the system was flawed and came up with some proposals for change, so that private Members' Bills would at least be put to a vote at the end of Second Reading—not as much of a change as I would have liked, but progress nevertheless. It was disappointing, however, that the Government found no time to debate or endorse the Committee's proposals in the last Parliament.

I hope that the Procedure Committee will have more success this time around. Last time, the Government rejected the first proposal and did not even respond to the second proposal, so perhaps this will be third time lucky. I also hope that better progress will be made in this Parliament, because it is now widely agreed that the system is flawed. I do not often quote a Conservative MP, but I completely agree with what the Chair of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), said:

“In their current form private members' bills are a cruel deception that we play on our electorate.”

I agree, because the existing system gives a false promise to the public—that the procedure for private Members' Bills will result in meaningful legislation and make a difference to their lives.

I do not want to get too bogged down today in talking about the technicalities of parliamentary procedure. We could talk for a long time about process—I will make a couple of suggestions about that—but other hon. Members present also have suggestions, and I look forward to hearing them. What is more important is the wider principle: the false hope that the process gives members of the public, who think that they might be directly affected by what is being debated, and the impact not only on constituents, but on the reputation of Parliament, as the existing system fails the public.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making many good points. Does he agree that it is not just about the Government's ability to stop legislation on Fridays, but that the existing system is discriminatory against non-London or south-east hon. and right hon. Members, who find it more difficult to attend the Commons on Fridays?

**Jeff Smith:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. As a fellow Mancunian MP, I could not agree more.

The system gives false hope to people who want to see action on issues that matter to them: people, for example, who think it is a good idea for children to be taught first aid at school or carers who have to pay high car-parking charges when they visit hospital—the subjects of two Bills that were talked out on Fridays in recent months. Let me quote two people who were particularly frustrated. Jonathan Ellis of the British Red Cross said:

“It is very frustrating that the emergency first aid Bill was ‘talked out’ as we had cross-party support from MPs, over 14,000 members of the public and a number of other organisations. Filibustering denied the opportunity for a democratic vote on this uncontroversial issue and ultimately denied school children the opportunity to learn first aid.”

Ellie Rose of Macmillan Cancer Support said:

“It's not fair that many cancer patients and their carers pay extortionate hospital car parking charges in order to access life-saving treatment. An important opportunity was lost to vote on an issue that could have made a significant difference to hundreds of thousands of people's lives.”

We have all heard similar complaints and we have probably all had representations from our constituents. I have spoken to people who have tuned in to watch debates on issues that they had a personal interest in and that they thought Parliament was being given a chance to make a change on—a change that might have improved their lives or the lives of people they know, only to see a debate ruined by filibustering—

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jeff Smith:** How could I not give way to an hon. Gentleman with such experience of the subject?

**Mr Nuttall:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. If the Bills to which he has just referred were so important, why did they not attract sufficient numbers of MPs to be able to close the debate through the use of Standing Order No. 36?

**Jeff Smith:** Simply because the debates were on a Friday—I will come to that. If the hon. Gentleman is so convinced of the arguments against those Bills, we should have had a proper debate on a day in Parliament when lots of people are present. We could debate the issue and vote on it, rather than talking it out.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): I am on the Select Committee on Procedure and have had a private Member's Bill, and I have quite a lot of sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Does he agree that we are almost victims of our own misfortune, as it were, in that we have transferred sitting Fridays, on which we are sent to Westminster to represent our constituents and constituencies, to be constituency days? My hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) is

absolutely right that if issues are important, we should be able to say to our constituents, “I will not be at the opening of the school or the fête”—whatever it might happen to be—“because I am discharging my duties as a Member of Parliament on a sitting Friday,” of which we only ever have 13 in a year.

**Jeff Smith:** The hon. Gentleman has identified an important point, and I will come to sitting Fridays shortly. In some cases I have had hundreds of emails from constituents urging me to turn up on a Friday for a private Member's Bill—sometimes because charities or other organisations have mobilised them—and we are doing a disservice to those organisations and constituents, and to ourselves, by allowing expectations to be raised that a debate in Parliament will lead to a Bill being passed.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Expectation management is important, both for charities, in managing the expectations of those who are emailing us, and for us, in the way that we respond. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that to a certain extent that extends to the ten-minute rule Bill procedure? I had emails from constituents who wanted me to vote on a Representation of the People ten-minute rule Bill because they genuinely thought there would be a debate in this place that would change the voting system of the United Kingdom, but that was not going to happen. I do not think that is necessarily the constituents' fault. The charities have to take a bit of responsibility for managing the expectations of the people they ask to write to us.

**Jeff Smith:** I agree with that important point. Sometimes it is difficult to know whether it is due to lack of knowledge or wilful misreading of parliamentary procedure. I like to think it is the former, but that indicates that we need to be much more open and clear about not just private Members' Bills but a whole range of other parliamentary procedures, as the hon. Gentleman rightly indicated.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman not think it ridiculous to expect people outside this place to know the minutiae of procedure? Those of us who are in our first term are still struggling to come to terms with it and, when we have 27 Bills on a list and we are getting emails about No. 17, that brings the House into disrepute. The responsibility is on us, not on the charities or constituents.

**Jeff Smith:** That is a good point, and if the responsibility is with us, our responsibility is to change the system to make it understandable for the public.

When people write to us about these Bills, they think they are something that will make a difference, but we know as parliamentarians, once we have learnt the rules—some of us are still learning them—that it is not going to happen. A case in point is the NHS reinstatement Bill. Many constituents wrote to me and implored me to attend the debate because they thought it was an opportunity to change Government policy on the NHS, an issue of huge importance to many of our constituents. I was interested to hear the debate on the Bill. I thought there were flaws in it, but I understood the sentiment behind it and I was hoping to hear a debate in which the

issues were explored. However, on the day, as a result of filibustering, the Bill was left with around 20 minutes at the end of the sitting.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Seventeen minutes.

**Jeff Smith:** Seventeen minutes at the end of the session. That was hardly enough time for the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) to introduce the Bill properly. There was no chance to vote on it and now it is lost in the parliamentary wilderness. There is a fundamental dishonesty in a system that allows people to believe that a private Member's Bill will make a difference, when we parliamentarians know that the system will not allow that.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): On the day we were in the Chamber for that, one Member took up one hour and 20 minutes speaking on the first private Member's Bill. The general public think that there is a speech time limit, and that may be something we should really consider, because one hour and 20 minutes of chuntering on, as Mr Speaker would say, is ridiculous. That gave no time for the NHS Bill that everyone was desperate to have debated.

**Jeff Smith:** That is absolutely right, and I will come to time limits shortly.

We have two key problems. The first, which is widely acknowledged, is of Bills being talked out. Other hon. Members may want to speak about their experience of that. I have no doubt that Members who indulge in that practice will say in their defence, "We are working within the rules." If that is the case, we must change the rules.

It is not just about MPs talking Bills out, however. The second problem is that it is very difficult for a private Member's Bill to make any progress without the Government's support. If a Bill gets a Second Reading, even if the will of the House is clear, there is no guarantee that it will get parliamentary time to enable it to make progress. Back-Bench Members from all parties find it incredibly difficult to make a difference unless they have Government support and co-operation. It is therefore dishonest to pretend that Members can bring in a Bill without at least tacit Government support. Those are the two key problems, but we could introduce a combination of measures to tackle them and allow a culture change in this place in which private Members' Bills are taken seriously and given proper consideration. They relate both to when private Members' Bills are taken and how they are dealt with.

The key question, which has already been identified, is whether private Members' Bills should be confined to Fridays, because when they are, it is almost inevitable that they will not receive the consideration they are due. I am a new MP who came in last year, but from speaking to long-serving colleagues it seems there has been an increasing expectation in recent years that hon. Members should spend more time in their constituencies being available to their constituents.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. As a Member in this House since 2001, I have put a high

premium on being accessible to constituents on a Friday, as well as during as much of the rest of the week as I can, as I am sure that he does. Does he agree that the suggestion that private Members' Bills should perhaps be discussed on a Tuesday evening would be at least a step in the right direction, rather than giving them the graveyard slot of a Friday, which massively inconveniences those of us who put a premium on Fridays and who live a considerable distance from Westminster?

**Jeff Smith:** The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. It is quite correct that Members should be able to spend some time on a weekday in constituencies, visiting schools and businesses, doing advice surgeries and meeting residents, and it is sensible to allow one weekday a week for that. There should not necessarily be the need, therefore, to attend Parliament on a Friday. If we were to move consideration of private Members' Bills to another day, that would give all Members the opportunity both to take part in debates that consider those Bills seriously and to have time in their constituencies.

There are options. We could take private Members' Bills on a Tuesday or Wednesday evening or morning, or we could use some Back-Bench business time. I think it is recognised that that time is not heavily subscribed, so we could use some of it more effectively to deal with private Members' Bills on days when all Members are around Parliament. In addition, we should ensure that private Members' Bills are properly programmed, with sufficient time to discuss each one that comes forward.

It is not just about when, but about how we deal with the business. Here are three things we could do. First, there is no reason not to have time limits on speeches in debates on private Members' Bills. We have them regularly in other debates, so why should we not have them in those? Secondly, we could bring in rules to guarantee a vote on a private Member's Bill on Second reading.

**Simon Hoare:** The hon. Gentleman is being generous with his time. As he knows, the Procedure Committee is undertaking an inquiry into this matter and in our evidence gathering it has transpired that on a sitting Friday the Chair can indeed impose a time limit—there is nothing to stop them doing that. Without questioning the Chair's decision, the fact that they have not used that power is a question for the Chair, but the residual power is there for them to respond if they so wished.

**Jeff Smith:** The point is that that does not happen. My understanding is that under Standing Order No. 42 the Chair can direct a Member to discontinue their speech, but between 1945 and 1999 that was used on only 21 occasions, so that parliamentary procedure is used rarely. I also think there are better ways of organising our time. As I have said, if we moved the debates to a Tuesday or Wednesday, we could have a fuller debate, and all Members could be there. This is about a package of measures, not just a single measure.

We should guarantee the vote on Second Reading and, thirdly, if a private Member's Bill is agreed on Second Reading, we should guarantee time for it to be considered in Committee. Those are not difficult things to do, but if the measures are too revolutionary to bring in at once in this place, we could even introduce them as

[Jeff Smith]

a pilot and see how they go. They would be easy ways to improve the way we debate and vote on private Members' Bills.

The reason I was keen to debate this issue today is not solely the extensive negative publicity that the current process has generated in the media in recent months—and we have all seen such negative publicity, which reflects badly on Parliament. There was a more personal reason. I was sitting in the Chamber on a private Members' Bill Friday a few weeks ago, as hon. Members talked out a Bill, and I looked up and saw a group of school students in the Gallery. As a student of parliamentary oratory—I take an interest in it—I have to acknowledge the extensive skill involved in talking out the Bill. It was a masterclass in filibustering. However, to the group of school pupils in the Public Gallery the speeches must have been as boring as the process was mystifying. I remember thinking, “Is this the impression we want to give those young people of our Parliament? Is this really a positive image of politics and politicians?” I was, frankly, embarrassed to be in the Chamber that day.

We are sent here by our constituents to try to make a positive difference to their lives. They have a right to expect our discussions to be honest, realistic and serious. It is dishonest to the public to maintain the illusion that Friday's private Members' Bill debates are proper legislative process. Members bring forward private Members' Bills on serious and important issues. It is about time we debated them and voted on them as such. The last report of the Procedure Committee said of reform of programming:

“This is an idea whose time has not yet come.”

After what we have seen in recent months, I believe that that time has come.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Valerie Vaz (in the Chair):** Order. We are actually running short of time, so we can do one of two things. One would be for those who wish to speak not to intervene on others. My aim is that the Front-Bench speeches should begin at 10.35. I am loth to impose a time limit, but if I did it would be roughly three minutes, if everyone who wants to speak is to get in. That is my guidance on how long speeches should take to enable everyone to have their chance, and I ask hon. Members to use their discretion. If I impose a time limit, each intervention will take up a minute and encroach on others' time.

9.52 am

**Sir Alan Haselhurst** (Saffron Walden) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on finding an opportunity to raise this important matter, which is of concern not only to all parliamentarians but to those who watch our affairs. It is right that private Members should have the opportunity to initiate legislation, but we have to consider the terms on which that can best be done. They should be aware that they will always have doughty opponents—those Members who feel that private Members' Bills must

face a severer test than supposedly Government-tested legislation, and, of course, the Government of the day themselves.

The only point of dissent I felt with the speech of the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington was with his faint reference to the will of a Conservative Government. I appreciate that that is mostly what is seen in action at the moment, but the Lord High Executioner of private Members' Bills is a Government Whip and we must recognise that that is the reality. A Member whose Bill is flying in the face of the policy of the Government of the day will have a very hard task. However, that is not to say that over a period of time a good idea sown in a private Member's Bill may not be taken up and eventually gather support and become the law of the land.

We recognise that there are different types of Bills: there is the off-the-shelf Bill that is fairly innocuous in itself and gives a private Member the opportunity—the prestige, if you like—of having piloted a Bill through Parliament, and there are the new ideas that will vary in their attractiveness to colleagues and the public. I absolutely agree with the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington about the absurdities of Fridays, which do no good to Parliament's image and are wearisome even for those who are here. I think I can make the claim, for what it is worth, that no other Member of this House has presided over as many Friday debates as I have, and it is a disgrace that we can find no better way of dealing with things.

As the hon. Gentleman said, false expectations are raised among the public. However, I would add the rider that, where campaign groups get involved, they should know through the people they employ as parliamentary officers when a Bill has a real chance of being debated and when it does not. They stoke up representations. Numbers of people wrote to me about the National Health Service Bill, which has been referred to, and it was nonsense to suppose that it would get serious attention, regardless of its merits or demerits. We take a lot of time to lower the expectations that have been falsely raised.

Everyone who has spoken so far has, I think, recognised that Fridays have become ever more precious to Members as constituency days; so what fresh approach could we take? I do not pretend to present a completely thought-through package, but I offer some thoughts. The first question to ask ourselves is how many private Members' Bills it is reasonable to suppose might be brought forward in any one Session of Parliament. Bills produced by the various means now available are accumulating all the time, and that is going to ridiculous lengths; we end up, at the end of a Session, with 50, 60 or 70 Bills. That is obvious nonsense. It is more than any Government produce in a Queen's Speech.

We should also look at the means by which the Bills can be born. The ten-minute rule Bill should be subject to particular scrutiny, because many Members who have the opportunity of a slot to persuade the House to let them introduce a Bill have not got as far as drafting it. Yet the impression is created among the public that there is a Bill in existence. That cannot be right. Certain other Parliaments, many of which function according to systems that closely resemble ours at Westminster, find slots in prime time that allow a Member to raise an

issue but not necessarily to produce a Bill as a result. However, they can at least get prime time in which to reflect a matter of concern.

Another alternative, which the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington mentioned, is to think about Tuesday evenings; and I think I rather favour that. However, just as we have talked about whether Members want to be here on Fridays, we should recognise that quite a lot do not want to be here on a Tuesday evening—something that is reflected in the fact that we have advanced our sitting time to 11.30 with a finish time of 7. I am afraid that has been turbo-charged by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority rule under which colleagues who, in its view, live sufficiently close do not have taxpayer-supported accommodation close to Westminster—so they go home. That is unfortunate, but it is the truth of the matter. One can be bowled down in the Member's cloakroom by people who are rushing to catch a train after a 7 o'clock vote. They would have no appetite to be here on a Tuesday evening.

Nevertheless, I would suggest that if a Bill could be guaranteed a three-hour slot at that time there should be a deferred Division. The whole House could then participate in Second Reading at some time. That might create a situation, depending on the number of Bills, as to how much time it will take to fill in the pink slip on the deferred Division—but it would mean the view of the House could be better reflected. I would say that only one Bill should be dealt with per Tuesday evening, so that a Bill—even if it is an off-the-shelf Bill that takes five minutes to go through—cannot be on the Order Paper as a means of holding up consideration of a second Bill. We should decide what is a reasonable number of Bills, and consider the number of Tuesday evenings that there will be in a Session. We could consider adding Wednesday evenings if we wanted to further multiply these opportunities.

If Bills get the chance of a Second Reading, should one have only one Committee channel for them, or should there be a second Committee channel? That is another option to consider. We then come to the more complicated business of Report and Third Reading. The hon. Gentleman hinted that the Backbench Business Committee might have some role in this. That is an elected Committee. A Member could appear before it as the promoter of a Bill that has got a Second Reading and negotiate to get time provided for Report. Third Reading, again, could be subject to a deferred Division.

We should think about the venue. Westminster Hall Chamber is now sufficiently mature. That matter is separate from the subject matter of this debate, but as part of any review of the use of this Chamber, we should consider whether there is a means by which there could be a proper ventilation of private Members' Bills here, rather than necessarily in the main Chamber. I agree that time limits on speeches could, in the context of a more general reform, become a more common approach if demand is there.

Those are my thoughts. I hope they are helpful in considering the way forward. They are not perfectly rounded or anything of that kind. I add one final caution, if I may: when we use the term “will of the House”, we must be careful to recognise that that should be the will of the whole House, not just the will of 40 Members who have managed to get something through at the present time. The hon. Member for

Manchester, Withington is right to raise this matter. The public are now viewing our proceedings on a Friday, wondering what the heck we are all about at that time, and we have to do better by them.

10.1 am

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): May I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on securing this debate? It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst).

Members of the public who are following this might think it is a self-regarding, inward-looking debate about what we do as the House of Commons. That is perhaps understandable, but I argue that this debate actually strikes at the heart of our role as elected Members of this House. Erroneously, we are considered to be legislators, but the reality is that we are not legislators at all. Back-Bench Members of Parliament have little or no control over legislation and the progress of it in this House.

As the right hon. Gentleman just said, all Governments—I have served under Conservative Governments, Labour Governments and coalition Governments—take control of the legislative process. It is perfectly natural for Governments to want to use the time available in this House to their benefit, but that ignores the role of Back-Bench MPs altogether. The Government, in my view, hold far too many cards.

In my hon. Friend's opening speech, he talked about some of the successful private Members' Bills in the late 1960s. They were mostly social reform measures. He referred to them, so I will not repeat that, but the important thing about those Bills was that they were all Government handout Bills, mainly associated with Roy Jenkins.

I want to say a word about a solution to this problem that would put more power in the hands of Members of Parliament and take power away from the Government in controlling the process, but first I want to talk about the role of the Procedure Committee, to which reference has already been made. I am a great admirer of the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), who chairs that Committee, but I detect a singular lack of will on the part of that Committee to resolve this issue. I do not want to criticise any members of that Committee, and certainly not the Chair; but this issue has been outstanding and urgent for a long time, and yet the Committee has failed to come up with a solution.

**Patrick Grady:** There are several members of the Procedure Committee here. We are putting a lot of effort into the current investigation and did so on the previous one. A very comprehensive report was produced at the end of the last Parliament, and then the Government did not make time for debate. It is important to have that on record.

**Mr Nuttall:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point, very briefly?

**Mr Howarth:** I cannot give way without responding to the first intervention. I will give way in a moment, if the hon. Gentleman exercises a little bit of patience.

[Mr George Howarth]

My criticism is not of the work that is being done, but of the lack of will there seems to be to bring the matter to a conclusion, not necessarily on the part of the Procedure Committee or of this House. My argument is that Members of this House have to take control of this issue and determine what they want to do. It is as simple as that. No amount of effort on the part of the Procedure Committee can, in itself, bring about that solution.

**Mr Nuttall:** I am truly grateful. I think I am right in saying that I am the only Member here who served on the Procedure Committee in the previous Parliament. That Committee did amend its proposals to try to meet the wishes of the Government. To be fair, it tried to do all it could to reach an agreement.

**Mr Howarth:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention; I simply observe that we are no further forward on the issue. Despite the frequent and lengthy deliberations of the Procedure Committee and everybody else, we are still in the position that my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington described, whereby the public look askance at what we do on a Friday in this House. Frankly, we need to do something about that. My argument is that no Committee of this House seems to have the will or the drive to bring the matter to a conclusion. We, as Members of this House, have to take control of this issue and determine a course of action that will resolve the problems.

The right hon. Member for Saffron Walden and I have been looking at this problem in parallel, from different points of view. We have, between us, some of the solutions to the problem. I thank the Clerks in the House of Commons for their advice. I have been working to try to bring a solution. Certainly in terms of when private Members' Bills are considered, there is a solution, in principle. We could amend Standing Order No. 14. Unless we reduce the number of Bills, we would need to sit on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings—26 of each—for a three-hour period to make up the necessary time. There are other consequential amendments, but with time being at a premium, I will not go through them. For example, we would need to amend Standing Order No. 12 so that the House would not sit on Fridays unless otherwise ordered to do so, and we would have to repeal Standing Order No. 19 altogether.

The right hon. Gentleman and I, between us, have some of the solutions, but other issues would need to be resolved. How would we timetable? I certainly would not be averse to the Backbench Business Committee taking control of the timetable. One thing that has not been mentioned yet is that any Back-Bench Member who had a serious prospect of bringing legislation to a conclusion would need advice about the drafting of private Members' Bills. We all think that we could sit down and draft a perfect Bill. In reality, having been a Minister responsible for legislation in the past, I know that that is not the case. Any of us, in order to do that properly, would need advance advice from parliamentary draftsmen, to ensure we had a competent Bill.

If the House wants to control this issue, it is in our hands. One way forward might be for Mr Speaker to establish an advisory committee as to how to deal with private Members' Bills. If he was minded to do so, I

would certainly be happy to be part of that, and I am sure other Members would also. This issue can be resolved if we, as a House, have a will to resolve it.

10.9 am

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): We can see the interest in this issue from the attendance today, and we are not going to have a lot of time to air our thoughts. The Procedure Committee is looking into the matter for the third time, yet nothing appears to have changed. Personally, I have experienced the problems with private Members' Bills on two occasions. One was with the Off-patent Drugs Bill, on which every Member who spoke did so in support. The responding Minister then stood up and said, "I will speak for 27 minutes and this will be finished." The other occasion was with the recent National Health Service Bill, which has been referred to. That got 17 minutes of debate after four and a half long hours on the previous Bill. People have written to me asking me to speak on a Bill that is 17th down the list and will never be aired. We are being disingenuous, and the system brings us into disrepute.

There are things to be said for timetabling private Members' Bills on a different day, because for all of us who live outwith a commutable distance, Friday is our time in the constituency. We cannot do a surgery on a Monday morning before coming to the House, and we cannot attend meetings in the evenings. Therefore, this is a big deal. Members must give up time to attend on a Friday, and the fact that it is such a farce, with Bills not coming to a vote and perhaps not even a debate, means that most Members simply do not attend. After they have attended a few Fridays, that is it—it is over.

We are often given the impression by the Chair that it cannot set time limits, yet when I attended the excellent debate on the Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill, a time limit was set. Filibustering was not used and the Bill came to a vote. It was a really honest debate and the public response to it was incredible. The Bills that are looking for time tend to be on social reform issues and things that everyone would benefit from, which ought not to be controversial, and I feel that the procedure is partly about the Executive keeping Parliament under control.

In the Scottish Parliament, every Member has the option of two private Members' Bills in an entire Parliament, and they must get support from a minimum of 18 other signatories from at least half the parties. Once that has happened, a Bill is given time and there are time limits on speeches, and it must be brought to a vote. The Non-Government Bills Unit provides the support to bring it through. Private Members' Bills that come purely from a Back Bencher therefore result in legislation. I think we all recognise the many different things that could be done, but the time is now to actually do something.

10.12 am

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) for securing the debate. Like him, I have attended several sitting Fridays since I came to this place. I have to say that on two of those occasions, I had two very different experiences.

One was what I consider to be Parliament at its best and the other was what I consider to be Parliament at its worst.

The first, which was referred to by my hon. Friend, was the Assisted Dying Bill, on which we had a full debate. Many Members contributed and we had a clear outcome. The second occasion, which has also been referred to, was when two Bills were debated: the Off-patent Drugs Bill and the NHS (Charitable Trusts Etc) Bill. Both were worthy matters for debate, but events were manipulated so that the Off-patent Drugs Bill was talked out.

The particularly frustrating aspect of that for me was that the first Bill, on NHS charitable trusts, was uncontroversial, but several Back Benchers used and abused the system to ensure that the second Bill was talked out. The charitable trusts Bill had a particular application to Great Ormond Street hospital and the legacy of J. M. Barrie, so that gave Members the perfect opportunity to talk at length about his work and, of course, Peter Pan. However, such was the garrulous nature of proceedings that the words "Peter Pan" were mentioned more times in the debate than they were in the original book—if that does not damage the reputation of Parliament, I do not know what does. Certainly by the end of the debate I was ready for a man in green to fly me away from the Chamber.

Most of all, the situation disappoints, frustrates and angers the many members of the public who will rightly feel that to some Members, the playing of parlour games is more important than proper debate and scrutiny of legislation that could change people's lives. Of course, it is a matter for Members if they wish to attract the obloquy that follows if a well-intentioned Bill is defeated, but is that really what their time in Parliament should be remembered for? Is democracy not about engaging with the issues, trying to persuade others of the case and then testing that with a vote?

The nub of the issue is that we have a dishonest process. The 2013 report from the Procedure Committee identified the central issues, to which my hon. Friend referred. The report correctly stated that the overwhelming majority of private Members' Bills fail because of a lack of time, but one only has to read the numerous press reports about parliamentary recess lengths to understand that the public will not be too sympathetic to the idea that we do not have enough time to discuss legislation. Even now, 60 private Members' Bills appear on the latest Order Paper, despite the fact that there are no sitting Fridays currently scheduled for the rest of this Session. None of them have any chance of passing into law, so why are they there? It just gives people a false impression and does this place no credit at all.

If the Government of the day do not wish to see private Members' Bills pass, they have the majority to ensure that they do not, and they should have the courage to say so. I am sure that most members of the public would prefer a straightforward response from the Government, rather than the games that are currently being played, which do us no credit at all.

10.15 am

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on securing the debate. However, I have to say that I think it is slightly premature, given that, as has

been referred to, the Procedure Committee is looking into the matter. It has conducted a number of evidence sessions and will shortly be issuing a report, about which I cannot talk this morning for obvious reasons.

However, I want to put a couple of things on record very briefly—I am conscious of the fact that others want to speak. My first point—I speak as a northern Member of Parliament who represents a northern constituency, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), who is a frequent attender on Fridays—is that if a private Member's Bill reaches the statute book, it affects my constituents in just the same way as a Government Bill. I therefore regard it as my job to give that Bill the same level of scrutiny as I would any other Bill.

**Dr Philippa Whitford:** Is the difference not that if we have a Government Bill, we know we will get to vote? If we come here on a Friday for a private Member's Bill, we probably will not.

**Mr Nuttall:** The answer to that lies in Standing Order No. 36. The hon. Lady referred in her speech to the assisted dying debate. Because there were so many Members in the House that day, there was no need to have closure motions, because the parties agreed that it would go through. It was the will of the House that there should be a vote, so a vote took place on the merits of the Bill. The important thing about that Bill was that, just as in the case of the Bills that the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington referred to, such as on the abolition of the death penalty and abortion, it was on a matter of conscience, on which Members have a free vote. To put it another way, the Government are neutral on such matters. As has been said a number of times this morning, no Back-Bench Member should expect their Bill to get through the House unless it has the support of the Government, or at least their tacit silent agreement to stand aside.

**Mr George Howarth:** Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that although those are matters of conscience, the problem with the current procedures is that we are prevented from having the opportunity to exercise our conscience?

**Mr Nuttall:** Well, there was a vote on the Assisted Dying Bill. As far as I am aware, when any Bill on a matter of conscience has come before the House, it has generally been given a vote. However, I make no apologies for using the procedures of the House to oppose a Bill in any way that I can.

I am conscious of the fact that my three minutes have already gone, Ms Vaz—although I have taken a couple of interventions—so I will just say this: those who want to change the procedures of the House should be careful what they wish for. Anyone who thinks that simply changing the procedures will make it easier to get private Members' Bills through is frankly kidding themselves. The reality is that if the time for consideration of private Members' Bills is moved to a Tuesday or Wednesday evening, the Government will use their majority and a three-line Whip will be imposed on Government Members. Any Bill that the Government oppose will be voted down—that is the reality of the situation. I look forward to hearing what other Members have to say.

10.19 am

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall), and I am pleased that his contribution was relatively brief.

I am a relatively new Member of Parliament, and when I started, the documentary “Inside the Commons” was being filmed. When I watched it and saw the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) filibustering, I thought, “It’s editing and artistic licence. They’re showing Parliament in a particular way, but surely that’s not really how it conducts its business.” But I witnessed it at first hand at the Committee stage of a private Member’s Bill, the NHS (Amended Duties and Powers) Bill. The hon. Member for Bury North took up the whole two hours of the first session talking about the difficulties of starting at 9 o’clock in the morning and people’s perceived travel problems getting to the Committee, and the Committee stage was talked out. The hon. Member for North East Somerset gave us all manner of information about his dietary habits. We all know that he loves Cadbury’s Creme Eggs.

**Mr Nuttall:** I served on the Committee, but the Bill was abandoned by its supporters. We would have been happy to debate it day and night, but its supporters decided to give up on it.

**Liz McInnes:** I am sure the hon. Gentleman would have been happy to carry on debating it day and night, but the fact is that no meaningful debate was allowed.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) for securing the debate, because it is vital to do something about the charade on Friday mornings. I was present when the Hospital Parking Charges (Exemption for Carers) Bill was shamefully talked out. That was an absolute disgrace, and the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) deserves an honourable mention for his part in not allowing that Bill to make progress. I was also present for the Compulsory Emergency First Aid Education (State-funded Secondary Schools) Bill. That was outrageous. I had been encouraged by constituents to be there, and as many hon. Members have said, we give up our Fridays to attend. I am a northern MP, and I give up time in my constituency to take part in discussing Bills that go absolutely nowhere.

This afternoon, I will present a petition to No. 10 Downing Street on the Criminal Driving (Justice for Victims) Bill. It is a private Member’s Bill and has no chance of being heard, so we must resort to presenting a petition with 20,000 signatures.

**Valerie Vaz (in the Chair):** Three more hon. Members—Margaret Ferrier, Nick Thomas-Symonds and Julie Cooper—have written in asking to speak. After that, two more Members want to speak. I aim to start the wind ups at 10.35 am.

10.23 am

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on bringing forward this important debate.

For me as a new Member, the past year has been a steep learning curve. I have had to become educated in not only the rules and procedures of the House, but the unspoken courtesies and quirks. Tradition is evidently important, and it is not hard to see why. The parliamentary estate is impressive and rich in historical significance, and it perpetuates tradition and keeps some of that history alive. However, there are signs that the House is unafraid of moving with the times. The widespread availability of live and on-demand video feeds show not the willingness to do that but an earnestness to make the process of democracy more transparent. The example of ParliamentLive.tv is apt, as it is a wonderful illustration of how an emerging technology can wonderfully complement the existing *Hansard* without replacing it.

Coming to this place with a fresh perspective, I have also found myself growing frustrated with some of the more time-honoured traditions. The most frustrating procedure has been that for debating and voting on private Member’s Bills. My chagrin seems to be shared by the wider public, because social media has recently become alight with talk of Bills being talked out, and the word “filibuster” seems to be used more frequently.

There seems to be greater public awareness of the democratic process. In Scotland particularly, it seems that the Westminster system is observed by the public in almost forensic detail like never before. The independence referendum had the wonderful effect of engaging many people who had come to feel disfranchised from politics but who now tune in regularly to parliamentary proceedings at Westminster. Comparisons are also being made with the Scottish Parliament, from which important lessons can be learned. The private Member’s Bill system in Edinburgh could be adopted and adapted for this place.

Some private Members’ Bills have led to wonderful moments of consensus recently. Video footage of the successful passing of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill, with unanimous support from the parties, went viral. The public gallery, which was filled with people whose lives would be made profoundly different by the legislation, erupted with joy. However, in this place, I am disappointed that some Bills have been the victim of what can only be described as party political pursuits.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Would the hon. Lady say that the fact that statutory instruments are now being used with gay abandon—that was criticised by Lord Judge this morning—is part of a wider pattern that includes the cutting of Short money and the Trade Union Bill? It is part of a wider pattern of an attack on democracy?

**Margaret Ferrier:** I take the hon. Lady’s important point, and I am sure the Minister will respond to it.

As a sponsor of the Food Waste (Reduction) Bill, I was eager to hear it debated and scrutinised, and for the House to be given the opportunity to vote on it. The measures in the Bill had widespread public support, and for it to be talked out was an affront to democracy. Similar legislation has been passed in other European countries, such as France and Italy, and the Bill warranted fuller discussion by the House. So too did the NHS reinstatement Bill. No time limits were imposed on speakers during the debate, and one speaker alone was able to orate for more than one hour and 20 minutes.

The system is clearly in need of reform, and I propose that time limits should become a regular part of the discussion of private Members' Bills. There also needs to be proper timetabling to ensure a more equitable method of dealing with Second Reading debates. There must also be the presumption of a Division on Second Reading. It is incredibly frustrating to take time away from my constituency on a Friday for an important debate, only to be denied a vote. That may not be a problem for some Members with constituencies in closer proximity to Westminster, but the logistics mean that Members based in Scotland must sacrifice an entire day in their constituency.

I hope that careful consideration will be given to the points I have raised. Reform of the current system will not only lead to a fairer process but create one that is much more accessible to the electorate.

10.27 am

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you as Chair, Ms Vaz. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on securing such an important debate.

As a new Member, I was delighted to be drawn in the ballot for private Members' Bills in June 2015 and to introduce the Off-patent Drugs Bill, the central aim of which was to bring about more consistent access to drugs for which new indications had been found. That Bill was talked out on 6 November, as hon. Members have said. Since then, I have been delighted to work on a cross-party basis with the hon. Members for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) and for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences to make progress in obtaining pledges from the Government and achieving legislative change through a different private Member's Bill.

None the less, the events of 6 November 2015 did a great deal of damage to Parliament's reputation. It is simple to see why, if one looks at what happened that day. Parliament starts at 9.30 on Fridays, and the first Bill under discussion was the NHS (Charitable Trusts Etc.) Bill, a laudable but simple Bill to allow Great Ormond Street hospital to continue to benefit from J. M. Barrie's "Peter Pan" royalties. The exchanges on that day sum up the issue. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), who introduced the Bill, said:

"The Bill is purely about 16 NHS charities and their move to independence, and about Great Ormond Street."

Madam Deputy Speaker responded that

"the hon. Lady is right to point out that the Bill is narrow."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2015; Vol. 601, c. 1257.]

Yet it took from 9.30 am until 1.8 pm to discuss that Bill. So uncontroversial was it that there was not even a Division. My Bill was then discussed, and things proceeded very quickly until just after 2 o'clock, when the Minister for Community and Social Care got to his feet and said:

"In the time available before half-past 2—and I make it very clear that I will talk until then, because that is the procedure here"—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2015; Vol. 601, c. 1304.]

There is no doubt about it: the Government were deliberately talking out the Bill.

I believe in the private Member's Bill system. It is very useful, because we have an Executive fused into our legislature and the Executive dominate parliamentary

business. This procedure gives Back Benchers an opportunity to make a difference. Also, there were social changes in the 20th century that were regarded as being better brought about by this route than by Government business. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) pointed out, the 1960s changes came about because the Home Secretary from 1965 to 1967, Roy Jenkins, either tacitly or overtly supported the Bills. Therein lies a double problem: first, there is the Executive dominance of the system, but secondly, there is the filibustering. The fact that the Executive exercise their dominance in that non-transparent, arcane way is equally a problem. The time has come for reform.

10.31 am

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): I am grateful to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) for raising this very important subject, and grateful just to have a few minutes in which to speak. It is ironic that when my name was selected and I was given the opportunity to introduce a private Member's Bill, five hours were available, but some Members took the opportunity to speak for more than 90 minutes on that occasion, with the deliberate aim of talking out the Bill, and the Minister who responded talked to the very last minute, half-past 2, so that there could be no possibility of a vote.

I chose a very serious subject that mattered to a lot of people in this country. I was trying to help, in a small way, the carers who give so much to so many, and I million carers and their families would have benefited had my private Member's Bill progressed. However, from the outset that was not to be. There was no pretence even of serious debate on the Government Benches. The opportunity was taken by three Members—the same three Members, I note, who regularly attend private Member's Bill debates on a Friday, so I have to ask the question: do they feel so strongly about every private Member's Bill? That was hugely disrespectful to the public who watched the proceedings. It brings Parliament into tremendous disrepute. Hundreds of people contacted me. They just could not believe it. They did not understand the system. How can the great British democratic system behave in this fashion, sometimes week after week?

The point has been made that if a private Member's Bill is introduced and is against the will of the Government, it cannot hope to succeed. I accept that; we live in a democracy. But should not we have the opportunity of a democratic vote? What is happening is dishonest. Members from across the parties gave their support to my Bill privately. I spoke with Conservative Members, Scottish National party Members, Liberal Democrats and the representative of the Green party, and they all said, "This is a fantastic Bill and we would like to see it implemented," but they, more experienced Members than I, had seen how the system works. Some of them were not able to be here on a Friday, and quite understandably. How could I expect an SNP Member to stay and have a long journey afterwards, knowing full well that the Bill would be talked out?

It is particularly dishonest when Government Members pledge support for carers to their constituents and out in the wider community—that is fine; they are entitled

[Julie Cooper]

to their opinion—but then come into Parliament and deliberately deny the public the knowledge that they are not delivering on that pledge. If the Government did not want the Bill to proceed—they clearly did not—let us be honest about it. Let us have a vote. Let the Government say, “We do not support carers,” which was what really happened on the day. If there is a will to sort this, we can do it.

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** I think the hon. Lady needs to be careful. Just because not enough MPs chose to come to support her Bill in Parliament does not mean they do not support carers. She has to be careful about differentiating between her Bill and the issue of carers.

**Julie Cooper:** That was how it appeared to the wider public, and many people were tuned in, watching the debate. Carers and their families were watching the debate. But there is a will to sort this. Time is pressing; I could talk about this issue for a very long time, but I will not. We can change this situation. If there is a will to do it, we can restrict the length of speeches. We can look at the days on which the debates are held so that Members from across the country can attend more easily. And we can ensure that every private Member's Bill comes to an honest democratic vote.

**Valerie Vaz (in the Chair):** Before we hear from the Front Benchers, let me thank all hon. Members who have spoken. We have had nine speakers, and every one has been very good with their time.

10.35 am

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on initiating this important debate. It has been said by many hon. Members that private Members' Bills perpetrate a deception on the public. We need to think hard about how to address that, because we know that people are becoming increasingly disengaged from politics and this system does nothing to remedy that; in fact, it simply adds to it. There is no silver bullet to restore trust, faith and engagement with this place, but we could do something about this issue to help to address that problem. Addressing the outmoded, outdated, convoluted and obfuscatory way in which private Members' Bills are dealt with in this place could restore a little bit of faith in the Westminster parliamentary system.

Like my colleagues, I cannot help but look at this system through the prism of the Scottish Parliament. We look at it as new MPs, admittedly, but with utter bewilderment because it makes no sense, and perhaps—I throw this out just as a suggestion—that partly explains why the people of Scotland feel much greater affinity with, and ownership of, the Scottish Parliament than they do with this place. Like the rest of the UK, the people of Scotland are very detached and disengaged from what happens in this place. There is much that this system can learn from the Scottish Parliament if it is serious about addressing the disengagement that constituents feel.

We have talked a lot today about the NHS reinstatement Bill—the National Health Service Bill. Like my colleagues and, I suspect, the hundreds of thousands of people across the UK who are concerned about that Bill and the wider issue, I watched what happened in the debate. There is no point in blaming it on procedure and saying, “That is how it works.” We looked at the response to the debate and what we saw was what very much appeared to be contempt and disregard for the very important issue that that private Member's Bill was trying to address. What that tells those of us who were frustrated on that day and what it tells the public is that there is little or no opportunity for MPs or groups of MPs to introduce a meaningful debate on something that does not have the support of the Government, so I ask: where is the balance between the Parliament and the Executive? We watched the debate that day on the NHS reinstatement Bill with utter despair, because we know that all it takes is three or four MPs to filibuster, chunter, ramble and obfuscate in order to throw the entire issue that the private Member's Bill is trying to tackle into chaos—into the long grass.

**Mr Nuttall:** Will the hon. Lady not accept that if any Member in the Chamber attempts to behave in the way that she has just described, the Member would be immediately brought to order by the Chair and told to get back to the topic under debate?

**Patricia Gibson:** I sincerely wish that the hon. Gentleman were correct. When I watched what happened that day—admittedly, as a new MP with fresh eyes and all the rest of it—I said to myself and a couple of my colleagues, “If this is the mother of Parliaments, God help the others.” The hon. Gentleman was present in the Chamber that day and I know that he knows that there was a clear attempt to talk out the NHS reinstatement Bill. That is evidenced by the fact that 17 minutes were allocated to the debate of that Bill, and 17 minutes is not even a proper debate.

**Dr Huq:** I am a London MP so I do not have the Scotland problem, but even I have found the situation frustrating. On one of those frustrating Fridays, I went into a TV studio with a Conservative Member and explained what had happened. He sort of said, “You should have known better. That's our hit squad. We send them every Friday.” For us, as new MPs, the honeymoon should not be over yet, but we are continually being frustrated on Fridays.

**Patricia Gibson:** I understand exactly the hon. Lady's point. I am afraid that the honeymoon was over very quickly in terms of parliamentary procedure because what we see, and what we saw on that day, are shenanigans and parliamentary games, which do this place and our constituents no credit. It matters in the wider sense because the public do not understand the outdated procedures of this place. And why should they understand? I have been here for almost a year and I do not understand. I do not know what is going on because it makes no sense.

I know we are under time pressure, but I will leave hon. Members with this thought: this place is detached from the people it seeks to represent and we have to be very careful because this place is in danger, if we are not already quite there, of becoming an absurd and grotesque

carbuncle on the face of the UK. If we seek to represent people, we must take it seriously. We must treat serious debates that aim to do serious things with the respect that they deserve. Our constituents deserve better.

10.41 am

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I join others in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on securing this important debate. I thank all my colleagues who have spoken passionately on this procedural subject. In particular, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) and my hon. Friends the Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) and for Burnley (Julie Cooper) on their contributions. It has been valuable to hear the experiences of those who have tried to introduce their own Bills and who took part in the lottery that we were all excited about at the beginning of the Session, only to find that it is a cruel joke not only on the public, but on us as individuals starting our adventures in Parliament.

It is clear to the majority of us that the current system for debating and voting on private Members' Bills is undemocratic. It looks outdated to the public and it needs to change. Individual MPs currently have virtually no chance of influencing legislative change. This place has nothing to fear from the duly elected representatives from all parts of this nation raising important issues that are a high priority for constituents or large sections of society.

As the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) mentioned, other parliamentary systems make specific provision for individual Members to be able to create, generate or better influence change to legislation, and now we have the opportunity to do that ourselves. Since the election, Bill after Bill that could have saved lives and money, and helped those who most need it has been blocked. That is not only damaging to those pieces of legislation that have not passed into law; it is hugely damaging to our democracy, because they were blocked by filibuster and were not even voted on.

**Dr Huq:** Is my hon. Friend aware that there is currently an e-petition called "Reform the rules on filibustering or 'talking a Bill to death'"? It has 50,000-plus signatures. This has gone beyond an anoraky issue of constitutional reform.

**Melanie Onn:** I am well aware of that. It just shows the importance of the issue to members of the public. I would urge anybody who is tuning into Parliament TV today to sign up. Maybe we will have a private Member's Bill on private Members' Bills at some point.

I do not want to echo comments that have already been made too much, but it is really not fair that one Member of this House can block legislation from being voted on and possibly becoming law. We never hear a defence of the filibuster rule. We hear objections to changes to the procedures and we hear Members justifying their actions by working within the rules, but very rarely do we have an outright defence of the system. That is because it is unjustifiable for one or two MPs to deny the representatives of the rest of the country a voice on important and potentially life-saving legislation.

Very often—we have heard examples of this—it is a Government Minister who does the filibustering and not some rogue Back Bencher, which often seems to be the general impression. An Education Minister blocked the Bill that would have made it compulsory for children to be taught emergency first aid at school, and the Minister for Community and Social Care talked out a Bill to allow the NHS access to low-cost medical treatments for conditions such as multiple sclerosis, cancer and Parkinson's. The same Minister prevented a Bill from passing that would have exempted carers from paying hospital parking charges.

**Simon Hoare:** I have much sympathy with what the shadow Minister and her colleagues have been saying, but we all have to accept, whether we like it or not, that it is a misnomer to talk about private Members, because none of us is. We are all part of a party machine. If the Government of the day, irrespective of what stripe they are, do not support a Bill—irrespective of how we change the Standing Orders and whether we sit on a Tuesday, Saturday or Thursday—and do not want it to go ahead, it will not go ahead.

**Melanie Onn:** The important thing is that we should at least have the opportunity to vote on these things, which we do not have at the moment. If we are going to run a Parliament and say to people, "We're here to influence change. We can properly represent you," and then be denied that, it is the time for change.

As long as the Government are able to veto private Members' Bills before they are voted on, the only Bills that will be allowed to pass are the ones that the Government are in favour of, but if the Government are in favour of them, they could just as easily introduce the legislation themselves. Why do they not just do away with the nonsense—that is how it is viewed at the moment—of private Members' Bills?

Other speakers have said that it would not be right to allow the small number of Members who turn up on a Friday to decide the laws of the country, but I think that the current system for private Members' Bills actively discourages Members from being here on a Friday because, as there are no time limits on debates, it is impossible to know which legislation will be reached and debated, let alone what will be voted on. Most MPs, including me, would rather spend an extra day in our constituencies than stay in Westminster on the off-chance that their Bill will reach a meaningful discussion or even a vote.

**Sir Alan Haselhurst:** I made clear my position on the need for reform, but we have to be careful. If we are going to say that private Members' Bills should have the same degree of scrutiny as all measures brought before the House, Members will have to commit to rather more time at Westminster than there has been an appetite demonstrated for in recent years.

**Melanie Onn:** I am particularly concerned about the time we have to discuss this. We have changed the system. In the previous Session, there was a change so that petitions that reach 100,000 signatures can be debated in the House of Commons. We can make meaningful changes when we really want to. Although many people will be pleased that debates can take place,

[Melanie Onn]

what they really want to see is change. Our legislative process is long overdue an upgrade. Is it not time that we put an end to this cruel joke that we are playing on the public?

Hon. Members have suggested several different changes to the way that we debate and vote on private Members' Bills, and I hope they will be heard fully. The suggestions are an improvement because the processes are based on the reality of the system as it operates today, rather than a notional way, as has been suggested by Conservative Members, that is just not based in fact or reality.

I await the Procedure Committee's forthcoming report and recommendations because we are open to further suggestions. The hon. Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) suggested that perhaps this debate is in some way premature. I would say entirely the opposite: this is a very timely debate. We do not want yet another report that does not get anywhere; we would like some commitment to change, which will hopefully change things for society for the better.

To challenge the point about private Members' Bills always being about matters of conscience, I am not clear where there is a matter of conscience in higher education information or the fitness of homes for human habitation. Private Members' Bills are not always about matters of conscience. I support the comments of the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford): some of them are about social reform matters and are important to many people.

The most important thing is that the Procedure Committee and the Government should recognise that the current system does not work and needs to change. The Procedure Committee's second report said that it would not be putting its proposals to the House and that, instead:

"This is an idea whose time has not yet come."

Following the passion Members have shown today, I entirely disagree with that statement. This is entirely the idea's time, and I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will commit today to allowing the whole House at least to debate and vote on the Committee's proposals once they have been published.

10.50 am

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) on securing this debate. I also welcome hon. Members who have participated, particularly those who have shepherded, or have tried to shepherd, a private Member's Bill through Parliament—or, indeed, who have supported their hon. Friends in trying to do so. It is noticeable that most Members here today, although not exclusively, are from the 2015 intake, and it is encouraging to see so many hon. Members who have an interest in parliamentary procedure and who want to use this place to get things done.

It is an important principle that a Member of Parliament can initiate legislation and that it is not left to the Government. There are three ways to achieve that in this House. There are ballot Bills and the private Member's Bill process, with ballot Bills having priority on sitting Fridays, which are dedicated to private Members' Bills.

We have ten-minute rule Bills, where at least a debate is guaranteed on the principle of the Bill, and we also have presentation Bills, which are probably the ones that have the least chance of getting a debate because ballot Bills have priority on sitting Fridays. However, each route has seen success in securing an Act of Parliament, so it has been possible to use each of those routes to get a change in the law.

Members should not measure success on their particular issue only by achieving an Act of Parliament. I happen to have secured an Act of Parliament in the first Session of the last Parliament, from 2010 to 2012, so I have been through the process of having to organise a debate and a Committee and having to find a Member of the House of Lords who is prepared to take the Bill through, and it is not a light undertaking. Indeed—dare I say it?—I am sure that hon. Members who were successful in the ballot, even if they were drawn below No. 7, will have been inundated with phone calls and emails before they even knew that they had been successful in the ballot, which shows that there are organisations out there that are keen to use this process to secure legislation.

**Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con):** My hon. Friend's words of encouragement are to be taken on board. May I give her an example? In a series of successive Sessions, I introduced a Bill to outlaw drug driving, which was eventually implemented by the Government.

**Dr Coffey:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, which is that hon. Members should think about the outcome of what they are trying to do. Using their Bill as a device might not always result in an individual Act of Parliament but, as he says, such Bills often result in change.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) mentioned her Bill. Carers UK has supplied written evidence to the Procedure Committee's current inquiry, and it is fully aware of how to use private Members' Bills. Carers UK rightly encouraged people to come along to support the Bill, but it is happy that it secured a change in ministerial guidance, which was committed to on the Floor of the House that day. Even though the Minister said directly that the Government would not support that Bill, he said that they would support some of the Bill's outcomes through a change in guidance.

**Mr George Howarth:** I congratulate the Deputy Leader of the House on being successful in getting a private Member's Bill through Parliament but, as a generality, does she agree that, in all seriousness, we are not legislators?

**Dr Coffey:** I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. He has been a Minister, and he can use that experience in his role as a Member of Parliament. I believe that we can, if we wish, make a serious contribution to the progress of any law going through this House.

Traditionally, private Members' Bills have been used to raise smaller issues, as well as big, significant issues of conscience, which have already been mentioned. The private Members' Bills that have been successful have either changed an outcome in Government policy in due course or have made a modest and sensible change to the law with which people agree. In this Session, six

such Bills have passed through the House of Commons, of which three have received Royal Assent and three are in the Lords.

It is important to say that, although the Government do not, and should not, have a monopoly on legislation, they have a mandate to legislate, whereas private Members' Bills do not necessarily have an elected mandate from the country. As a consequence, I support the fact that we should encourage people to write to us if they want to support particular legislation, and I will shortly address expectation management and the role that each of us can play.

It can be difficult to get legislation through if the Government are opposed to it, but it has happened. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) succeeded with the Autism Act 2009. She secured a closure against the wishes of the then Labour Government by getting a sufficient number of Members to come and support the Bill—those Members were not just from the Conservative party. She then managed to make progress through the House. The right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) knows that such Bills are in the control of hon. Members because we can get closure motions. There were several such closures in the previous Parliament, including on the Daylight Saving Bill, several on European Union (Referendum) Bills, on the Affordable Homes Bill, on the National Health Service (Amended Duties and Powers) Bill and on the International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Bill. Members were ready in case a closure motion was needed on the Live Music Bill. There was an unsuccessful attempt to move a closure on the Tenancies (Reform) Bill, when not enough people were here. I understand that constituency days are important, but if Members genuinely believe that a piece of legislation should make progress, it is within their power to make that happen.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Dr Coffey:** I only have two more minutes before the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington sums up.

On public perception, use and abuse, people have thrown about the word “filibuster.” I recognise that it is generic, but it is for the Chair to keep order in debate, and the Chairs do respond to filibustering. MPs and organisations need to be clear with their constituents, and with the people who contact them, about expectations. We have talked about the National Health Service Bill, which the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) presented on 1 July 2015. On that day, when she was asked, she said that Second Reading would be on 11 March 2016. There was zero chance of that Bill ever becoming law, and it was actually quite unlikely to get a debate. We have to remember that, historically, such Bills were the only way that Back Benchers could get

debates in the House. We now have more opportunities, through the Backbench Business Committee, debates on petitions and a lot more Westminster Hall debates. In a way, we have other opportunities to raise issues, rather than just through legislation.

Having a dedicated day for private Members' Bills matters. In the last Parliament, the House voted not to sit on Tuesday evenings, and I have heard it suggested that the House should sit on Wednesday evenings. There may be an opportunity for the House to reconsider its sitting hours, which I am sure the Procedure Committee is considering. There have been six written submissions to the current inquiry and five oral sessions, in which MPs, Clerks and journalists have contributed, and members of the Procedure Committee are here today. The Government look forward with eager anticipation to the publication of the Committee's report, and there may be an opportunity to debate it in due course—it is open to any Select Committee to try to secure such a debate on a report.

This has been an interesting and full debate, and I encourage Members to recognise that they can help to shape legislation—it is not just about the Government. The Government have the mandate, but people can work together on other issues. As the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) said, 11 September 2015 was one of the most powerful days that I have been in Parliament, and I was pleased with the outcome. Nevertheless, it was an opportunity for each and every Member, and a majority of Members came along and expressed their view decisively.

10.58 am

**Jeff Smith:** I do not have much time, so I will be brief in thanking all the Members who have contributed to this debate. We have had a respectful, interesting and mature debate, which is more than we usually get on Fridays. There is a consensus that there is deep frustration with the system on both sides of the House. The system is broken and change is needed. We have had some good suggestions, and I particularly thank the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) for their suggestions about ways forward. I hope that the Procedure Committee and, more importantly, the Government will listen to those suggestions and take them on board, because one thing is clear: the longer we continue with the current system, the more the reputation of Parliament will be damaged. The time has come for change.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the procedure for debating and voting on Private Members' Bills.

## Air Cadet Organisation and Gliding

11 am

**Dame Angela Watkinson** (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of gliding and the Air Cadet Organisation.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Ms Vaz.

I first became aware of concerns about the future of gliding after receiving a letter from the Air Cadet Organisation, which I assume was sent to many colleagues. I immediately took an interest as I have two local air cadet units—one in my constituency of Hornchurch and Upminster and the other just over the constituency boundary, in the part of Elm Park that lies in the constituency of the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas).

It is always a pleasure to see the air cadets march with the Royal British Legion in parades on Remembrance Day, Armed Forces Day and Battle of Britain Day. They are proud to wear their uniforms, and proud to remember those servicemen and women who have given their lives for their country. There is a close interest locally in the RAF because of the Hornchurch airfield, which played a prominent role in world war two, including in the battle of Britain, and local schools and roads are named in memory of pilots who flew in that conflict.

When I was at grammar school, which I am embarrassed to say was a very long time ago, it was in the days when it was not thought necessary for girls to know about current affairs, and when the only two respectable occupations for girls were teaching and nursing. At that time, it was usual for armed forces cadets to be run from most secondary schools; cadets wore their uniforms in school and paraded in the school playground. Sadly, over the years that became unfashionable and politically incorrect, and schools did not want to see pupils in uniform. I think that was a retrograde step and I, for one, would welcome the return of cadet corps in schools.

I am sure, Ms Vaz, that both you and my hon. Friend the Minister who will respond to this debate—the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr Brazier)—appreciate the value and importance of armed forces cadet corps, and indeed of all young people's organisations. That is because while young people are enjoying the activities arranged by those organisations, they are also learning qualities that will carry them through life and make them good citizens and good employees, such as teamwork, fitness, leadership, reliability, personal discipline, responsibility and self-confidence, plus the technical skills associated with their particular organisation. In that respect, the Air Training Corps is one of our strongest assets in youth development.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I am very pleased that my hon. Friend has secured this really important debate. I have air cadets in my constituency, up in Brownhills, and I have visited them on a number of occasions. Does she agree that air cadets also play a really important part in more general terms in the local community, by helping and linking in with community organisations?

**Dame Angela Watkinson:** I thank my hon. Friend for that valuable contribution, because she is absolutely right that young people's organisations, and the air cadets in particular, are noted for joining in with community organisations, for volunteering and helping with elderly people, and for raising money for charities, which makes those young people very well-rounded good citizens.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): May I just put it on the record at the very beginning that although there are very few people present I am delighted that the hon. Lady has secured this debate? This issue is really important in Northern Ireland. That is because, of course, in Northern Ireland the air cadets have had to travel to England for what has been a short but very valuable training course; and the fear in Northern Ireland is that such training will be lost completely if we move to residential courses in England. Young people cannot afford to spend such a long period of time away, and parents cannot afford the cost of such a residential course in England. Therefore, may I encourage the hon. Lady to seek assurances from the Minister when he winds up that Northern Ireland's air cadet corps will not be forgotten amid the changes that are about to be introduced?

**Dame Angela Watkinson:** I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution. The issue that she has raised about travelling distance and so on for air cadets is one that I myself will raise further on in my speech.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I have already been in contact with the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Dame Angela Watkinson) about this issue and I congratulate her on bringing it to Westminster Hall for consideration. In my constituency of Strangford, I have one of the RAF cadet squadrons, at Newtownards. However, it is the intention of the Minister and his Department that we will lose the opportunities for gliding at RAF Newtownards, which is operated out of Regent House School; the school has one of the largest cadet groups in the whole of Northern Ireland.

I will just make a point about cost. The cost of sending a student from Northern Ireland across to the mainland, which is the alternative to having the motor-glider in Northern Ireland, will be at least £80,000 for all those cadets, and it will cost £100,000, Minister, if the staff costs are added on to that. That is the price of a motor-glider that could be kept in Northern Ireland for 20 years. I say with great respect that the proposed change is not financially economical or viable. Does the hon. Lady feel that this debate enables the voice of people in Northern Ireland to be heard? If so, it will hopefully persuade the Minister to reverse his decision.

**Dame Angela Watkinson:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution and I will go on to talk about issues of funding and the value of investment in this activity, which will pay dividends in the future of the young people involved.

The concern about the Air Training Corps is the decline in cadet numbers, which were down 6.5% from 34,500 to 32,250 in the year 2014-15. That fall is predicted to become a 10% fall by April 2016 and is attributed, at least in part, to the declining opportunities for gliding.

The current air cadet gliding fleet comprises 81 Viking conventional—that is, winch-launched—gliders and 65 Vigilant motor-gliders. In 2014, a glider airworthiness review took place for assurance reasons. Colleagues will understand that all sports and physical activities carry a degree of risk, and demand the proper training of instructors and maintenance of equipment for health and safety. Gliding is likely to be quite high on the risk scale, for obvious reasons.

It has been decided that at least 73 Viking gliders will be recovered, but for reasons of practicality and value for money, only 15 Vigilant gliders will be brought back into service, with this residual fleet being retired in late 2019. That will leave 10 volunteer gliding squadrons out of the current 25, all operating the Viking. The 614 Volunteer Gliding Squadron—based at Wethersfield, near Braintree in Essex—will continue to operate; I was pleased to learn that, because it is the closest volunteer squadron to Hornchurch and Elm Park. Currently, the Wethersfield squadron serves a total of 55 air cadet units from as far away as Suffolk, Cambridge and London. The maximum reasonable travelling time from an air cadet unit to a volunteer gliding squadron is set at two hours, to avoid fatigue.

Given the reduction in volunteer gliding squadrons, the number of units using 614 VGS at Wethersfield is predicted to increase from 55 to around 135 or 140. A significant increase in the number of volunteers, instructors and staff living within reasonable commuting distance will be needed to sustain the squadron's contribution to the current national total of 50,000 flights annually, or to achieve the uplift of 40% in gliding—to 70,000 flights annually—that is planned by the Air Cadet Organisation.

I hope that the Minister will be able to give an assurance that the 10 remaining volunteer gliding squadrons, including 614 Wethersfield, will have a secure future in terms of airfield availability. As he knows, gliders may only be launched safely with cables given suitable airfield infrastructure, taking into account local airspace constraints and other airfield users. All those requirements limit the number of suitable venues, and alternatives would be difficult to find. Sustaining gliding opportunities would prevent worsening of air cadet numbers and ensure a strong base of air cadets and potential RAF recruits. In 2014-15, the Air Cadet Organisation accounted for 33% of officer intakes and 18% of RAF airmen intakes. It will become an increasingly vital source of high-calibre recruits with suitable experience and values for the service.

Common sense tells me that gliding is not only an exciting activity, but an expensive one. I am sure that budgetary constraints must play their part in decision making, but gliding is a worthwhile investment. Air cadets are the next RAF personnel. Alternatively, they might use their transferable skills acquired as cadets in other occupations, whether technical or engineering, where they will play their part in society and set an example to others. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give assurance to the air cadet gliding organisation that there is a secure future, albeit with a reduction in size, so that it can attract young people to join the Air Training Corps knowing that gliding opportunities will be included in their activities.

11.11 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Julian Brazier):** I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster

(Dame Angela Watkinson) for giving me some of her thinking in advance of the debate and I congratulate her on securing it. I am also grateful to other colleagues who have spoken. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) is coming to see me shortly about the situation in Northern Ireland, and my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies) has just been to see me about the situation in Wales. I have been looking particularly closely at those two specific issues.

**Byron Davies (Gower) (Con):** On the issue in Wales, the Government are expecting young people to travel at least three and a half hours from west Wales all the way to Gloucestershire to have the experience of flight. There is some talk about synthetic flight, but that in no way compensates for the thrill of flight when young people are being introduced to flying.

**Mr Brazier:** If I may, I will come back to my hon. Friend's intervention towards the end of my speech.

In November, I had the privilege of watching the cadets from 1838 (Elm Park) Squadron—it is based in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster—march proudly alongside the Royal British Legion at the Lords Mayor's show. They are great ambassadors for the air cadet corps and for the future of the Royal Air Force. It is a sobering thought that some of the pilots who saved this country in the battle of Britain were the same age as some of the oldest cadets. Since I took over as Minister for cadets last autumn, I have been lucky enough to visit air cadet units from places as far apart as Perthshire and south London, and I have been consistently impressed by the cadets' spirit of adventure, leadership and good citizenship skills and by the quality and dedication of their instructors.

Let us be clear that the recent restructuring of air cadet gliding is not a cost-cutting exercise. The Air Cadet Organisation remains hugely valued and the Royal Air Force is fully committed to offering flying training to all air cadets. My hon. Friend acknowledged that an in-depth audit of glider engineering in 2014 made it clear that the Vigilant and Viking fleets were not airworthy. The decline in numbers that she referred to reflects the fact that for nearly two years there has been no gliding in the air cadets. Indeed, almost half the air cadets I met recently at a 75th anniversary celebration event had not been in the air at all.

The blunt truth is that we were unable to find a sufficiently reliable contractor with the capacity to take on the bulk of the Vigilant fleet. Faced with no viable option but to draw it right down in the way that my hon. Friend described, we are increasing spending to get almost all the Viking gliders back into service, as well as offering an uplift of more than 50% in air experience flights. In addition, we can offer some excellent synthetic training through the generosity of the RAF Charitable Trust, to which I am most grateful. Let me reassure hon. Members that, following my recent announcement on the relaunch of air cadet gliding, we will get back to a position where all air cadets across the country have the opportunity to fly gliders and to participate in Grob Tutor air experience flights.

**Jim Shannon:** The cadets in Newtownards in my constituency operate out of Ards airport, where there is a lot of experience, skill and ability, which could provide the background technical expertise that is needed. Has the Minister considered offering such opportunities

[*Jim Shannon*]

outside the circle of companies that could look after the gliders? In Ards airport we have that ability, because there are already gliders there.

**Mr Brazier:** I am looking forward to the hon. Gentleman coming to see me shortly. I should say that we are setting up an air experience flight of powered aircraft in Ireland. Northern Ireland will be getting one of the two new offerings of air experience flights with Grob Tutors.

I appreciate that the loss of any volunteer gliding squadron will be disappointing, not least for the volunteers, who selflessly give their time to help to support and develop our young people, but it was essential to look again, given the grim background of what has happened with the gliders. Decisions have not been taken lightly or in haste, although when I took over, finding a resolution to this issue was my top priority from the cadet angle. I have taken advice from RAF experts, who are extremely committed to solving the issue. It became clear that our most sensible option in resuming sustainable cadet flying would be to provide a reduced glider fleet operated by fewer, but larger regional volunteer gliding squadrons. That was not an easy decision, but I believe it was the right decision.

While it is true that we are having to draw down the fleet of Vigilants, we are refocusing the resource on reinvesting for the future of the remaining volunteer gliding squadrons. We are extending the life of the Viking gliders by heavily rebuilding them. We are also building much improved infrastructure. Where cadets will have to travel longer distances, investment is being increased to include good quality residential accommodation for cadets and staff during weekends and camps.

I have been to see what will be the new Scottish centre of excellence at Kirknewton. The gliders will be as good as new. We have new winches for them. We have enhanced synthetic training, which we should remember means that each cadet does not have to spend the whole day waiting for their one go on the glider. The simulators really are good. I made a bit of an idiot of myself trying to fly a glider on a simulator, but they are remarkably realistic, and they are in addition to, not instead of, flying. There will also be a major uplift in the Tutor powered aircraft, with an increase of more than 50%, from 40 to 70, including the two additional new air experience flights.

**Lady Hermon:** Just for clarification for those air cadets in Northern Ireland who will be following the debate and who look for everything that mentions Northern Ireland, is it in the Minister's mind that air cadets in Northern Ireland will have the choice between going to the new facility that will, I think, be opened at Aldergrove airport—the Minister has hinted at that—or going to England, Scotland or Wales for residential courses? Actually, I do not think there are any residential courses in Wales, which is disappointing. If it is a residential course, will subsistence funding be given to those young people who have to travel long distances for a residential course?

**Mr Brazier:** I will have to come back to the hon. Lady in writing on the last part of her question about the detailed position, although I may be able to answer it in

a minute. As for the first part of her question, we envisage, as at present, cadets doing a mixture of gliding and powered flying. The powered flying will now be available in Northern Ireland, but the plan is for the gliding to have to be on a residential course. I should say, as the president of a sea cadet unit, that that is completely normal for kids going away with a sea cadet unit to sail or with an army cadet unit going off to a camp. We do not normally expect cadets to do everything in one day. [*Interruption.*] We will have a more detailed discussion when the hon. Member for Strangford comes to see me. Perhaps he might invite the hon. Member for North Down to join him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster specifically mentioned Wethersfield and 614 Volunteer Gliding Squadron. The plan remains that the size of the squadron will be expanded—she mentioned that—to facilitate its role as a regional hub. As she mentioned, Wethersfield has been identified for disposal as part of the MOD's programme of estate rationalisation by 2020. This is part of the Government's commitment to provide land for 160,000 extra homes by the end of the Parliament, so the squadron will move to another site. I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate that work to identify the potential future location remains at an early stage. I am confident that, throughout its transition to a future location, the staff of 614 Squadron will continue to ensure that the unit provides the same excellent training to cadets as it always has in the past.

In the last 48 hours I have talked to a former volunteer instructor who was with a unit that moved from RAF Locking in Somerset to Hullavington in Wiltshire, which is a round trip of more than 200 miles. Almost all the staff moved there and they may now be moving back to somewhere closer to their original location.

People have asked how the Air Cadet organisation can offer the same amount of experience to cadets with a substantially reduced glider fleet. Many Members will be aware that front-line Royal Air Force pilots in our flying training system make very extensive use of realistic simulators to provide basic flying skills training on the ground, prior to consolidating that in the actual training. This saves on real flying hours without diminishing the trainee's competence levels to operate the aircraft.

The Air Cadet organisation is following suit, developing a common syllabus so that every single flight in future will be focused on training—rather than simply providing a passenger experience—whether in gliding or powered flight. The air cadet aviation flying programme will remain unmatched by any other national cadet force worldwide.

The Royal Air Force Charitable Trust has generously purchased 25 simulators—part-task trainers. Although I did not do very well, I can attest to how realistic they are in preparing young men and women for flight, and I am most grateful to the trust for paying for those simulators.

The redesigned courses provide a cadet flying training structure built for the future, just like that used by our future RAF Typhoon and Lightning II pilots. When I was in Woolwich, I had a go on a very effective simulator for an F-22. I am sorry to recall I did not do particularly well on that, either. I am not the sort of person the RAF would ever want to recruit—parachuting and gravity do it all for you—but again I was impressed.

On the redesigned courses, cadets will learn basic flying skills from an early point in their air cadet careers starting with ground school lessons and realistic synthetic training. This smart use and integration of synthetic flying during the early stages will ensure that a much higher proportion of actual glider launches will be used for the consolidation of already learned skills and will get cadets ready faster to be able to go solo.

The planned uplift in the number of Tutor aircraft and the creation of two additional air experience flights will also enable us to fly a far greater number of cadets in this aircraft type. Again, this activity will be integrated into the wider aviation training programme. In future, all AEF powered flying will be phased to relate directly to the individual cadet's level of experience, so each AEF sortie that a cadet undertakes will further enhance his or her aviation expertise.

The RAF and I are extremely grateful for the commitment and professionalism of the volunteers who support each Volunteer Gliding Squadron, and so a plan has been developed to offer alternative opportunities for the volunteer gliding instructors who are affected by the closures. This includes opportunities for Vigilant instructors to convert to Viking and in some cases to transfer to another Volunteer Gliding Squadron. Another option is to transfer to a formally established ground cadre within a VGS that provides the synthetic training and ground school elements. We aim to have a significant gliding programme again by this summer and to have the full programme in place by 2018.

This year, 2016, is an important year for the Air Cadet organisation, as it celebrates its 75th anniversary and the cadet expansion programme continues to provide new cadet units throughout the country in schools. This is indeed an important year. There are two parts to the programme that I am still looking at in more detail in relation to Wales and Northern Ireland. I want to ensure that we have a fair outcome, although, as I mentioned, Northern Ireland is getting a new AEF squadron to balance the loss of the gliding.

After this very unhappy, unprecedented period, in which we have had nearly two years with no gliding, the combination of getting the Vikings back in the air again with the expansion of the Grob Tutor powered flying, and building in the simulators and the good quality accommodation that will enable weekends and camps to become a reality, this is a really positive way forward. I believe that air cadet gliding will emerge to be safer and more resilient in the long run and that the volunteer instructors will continue to be the strongest part of it. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster for initiating the debate and I thank all colleagues who have participated in it. [*Interruption*].

**Valerie Vaz (in the Chair):** Does the Minister wish to check the note that has been passed to him?

**Mr Brazier:** Thank you, Ms Vaz. I failed to say how much I have enjoyed speaking under your chairmanship for the first time. The note says that cadets are assisted through squadron and wing HQ budgets. Similar to when they attend annual camps in mainland UK, food and accommodation are free to cadets.<sup>1</sup>

11.28 am

*Question put and agreed to.*

1. [*Official Report, 27 April 2016, Vol. 608, c. 1MC.*]

## Mental Health Taskforce Report

[PHIL WILSON *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the report from the independent mental health taskforce to the NHS in England.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. This is a very important debate on the “Five Year Forward View for Mental Health” report, published in February. I pay tribute to the chair of the taskforce, Paul Farmer, who is the chief executive of the mental health charity Mind, and the vice-chair, Jacqui Dyer, for all their work. I also thank all the other members of the taskforce and the people throughout the country who contributed to its work. It is an excellent study that contains more than 50 concrete recommendations about how we need to go about improving mental healthcare in our country.

The report represents an historic opportunity. There are three reasons why I believe it is pivotal to the whole history of our approach to mental healthcare in Britain. First, both the public debate in Britain about mental health and our social attitudes towards it have been transformed over the past 10 years. The quality of the debate in Parliament, the media and the public square is at a completely different level from where it was for many years. We are addressing issues of stigma and are open to discussing mental health problems in society.

Secondly, there is a general recognition in the Government and across parties that for too long, mental health care has been underfunded in the national health service. There is now a mature debate about how we should fund mental health services over the next decade.

Thirdly, I strongly believe that, as a result of the work of many people from all political parties over a long period of time, mental health is now at the top of the list of public policy priorities. We now have the political will, which is manifested in the Minister himself, who is absolutely committed to delivering on the plan formulated by the independent taskforce. Those are the reasons why I believe the report represents an historic opportunity.

The report provides a route map for change so that we can give hope to those throughout the country who are currently suffering from mental health problems and who may not be getting, or feel that they are getting, the level of service that they should from the NHS. I shall concentrate on the implementation issues highlighted in the report. There have been many reports over the past 20 years, and many strategies have been determined by Governments of both main political parties. I think we would all agree that over that period we have not made sufficient or fast enough progress, given that mental health issues are becoming more visible in society and given the prevalence of the mental health issues we are seeing across the age range and across the social and economic landscape of the country. There is a real urgency that we get this right, and now.

What do we need to do to drive the change that we all want to see in the quality and availability of mental health care in Britain today? The report focuses on four areas that are critical to implementation—commissioning;

[James Morris]

the importance of research and data; the incentives, levers and payments for services in today's NHS; and leadership in the NHS and across Government. The truth is that, to achieve our goal of transforming mental health services in Britain, we need urgent action in all four areas.

The report is clear about the challenge we currently face on commissioning. It states:

"The quality of local mental health commissioning is variable. We found a twofold difference in apparent per-capita spend by CCGs, a more than threefold difference in excess premature mortality in people with mental health problems in England and a fourfold variation in mortality across local authorities."

The reality is that we need better and more effective commissioning at a local level.

The report discusses the model of commissioning set out by the "Future in mind" taskforce, which looked into child and adolescent mental health services and came up with recommendations for improving commissioning. Those recommendations, which are picked up in the "Five Year Forward View" report, speak to the need to improve commissioning across mental health services and across the age range.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for securing this debate and for all he has done for mental health in his time in Parliament. He has been an absolute champion of it. Does he share my concern, which is shared by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, that there is currently no proper accountability for local clinical commissioning groups? The Bill on accountability in commissioning that I presented to Parliament last year would have required every CCG in the country to report back to the Secretary of State every year on the resources and spend in the local area. That way we would know exactly what was going on and could ensure parity of esteem in resources and allocation.

**James Morris:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. He is right, and I will come to the need for greater accountability later in my speech.

On commissioning, the "Five Year Forward View" report states:

"The transformation we envisage will take a number of years and without clear information about what the best care pathways look like and good data on current levels of spending, access, quality and outcomes, it will be hard to assess the impact of organisational change and ensure mental health services are not disadvantaged."

Its very first recommendation is:

"NHS England should continue to work with Health Education England...Public Health England...Government and other key partners to resource and implement Future in Mind, building on the 2015/16 Local Transformation Plans"—

which I know are in the process of being implemented—

"and going further to drive system-wide transformation of the local offer to children and young people so that we secure measurable improvements in their mental health within the next four years."

I dwell on those recommendations because—this speaks to my hon. Friend's point—we need more transparency on what clinical commissioning groups are spending and where. The report is clear that there is currently

simply too much variability across the country. I have long been an advocate of the importance of local, decentralised decision making. It is important that clinical commissioning groups have the freedom to commission services that they think are appropriate to their local population. The report is clear that we need a more consistent approach on mental health services that focuses on collaboration and more integrated commissioning across the spectrum.

**Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): Will my hon. Friend reflect, in the context of the devolved settlement for services, on the importance of substance misuse services and on the impact that the fragmentation of those services away from other mental health services may have had on patient care?

**James Morris:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. We need to deal with some of the issues to do with fragmentation in the system—he refers to substance misuse. The thrust of the recommendations in the report is about making sure we have a more integrated approach to commissioning mental health services across the piece.

The second important facet of the implementation challenges that the report throws up is research into mental health services. It mentions the need to have a proper, coherent 10-year plan for research into mental health to fill what are, as many of us would agree, big gaps in the evidence base.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he share my horror at the fact that the Medical Research Council spent 3% of its budget on mental health research in 2014-15? That bears no relation to the degree of disease burden in our country, yet it chose to spend just that much on research.

**James Morris:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention and pay tribute to him for all the work that he has done, particularly when he was Minister with responsibility for this area. I agree that we need to spend much more on mental health research, and we need to know what we want to research. For example, there is much talk about the power of peer support in mental health. There is an assumption that it is a good thing and that it works, but we do not have a particularly rich evidence base about whether it does.

On the efficacy of certain psychotherapies, the evidence base shows that cognitive behavioural therapy can be effective for people with mild depression and anxiety, but we do not really know about the effectiveness of other psychotherapies that we may want to promote and develop in the national health service. We clearly do not know very much about a lot of emerging areas that have an impact on mental health. For example, using technology and mobile phone and other apps to help people with mental health problems is a big emerging area, but we do not know much about its effectiveness. We certainly do not know in any coherent sense about the implications of genomic medicine on mental health care. A coherent strategy on mental health research is required over the next decade so that we can extend and expand the evidence base, because the truth is that we are often flying blind.

**Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson.

Does my hon. Friend recognise that one of the key issues in constituencies such as mine, which is a low-wage, low-skill economy, is tackling depression? That is helping us get everybody into work. If we want growth, it is important that we deal with people who suffer from depression, which is, of course, another mental health problem.

**James Morris:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to support people with depression back into work. The report makes a number of recommendations, which he may be aware of, on the use of strategies such as individual placement and support to get people with mental health problems back into work.

The report also talks a lot about data, which underpin our decisions about where we should focus our efforts on mental health. It refers to a “black hole” of data and calls for a “transparency revolution” in mental health. As I said earlier, for a long time—probably 20 years or more—we have not been collecting sufficiently robust data about what is actually going on in mental health services. We need better data on what is going on to have a firm basis on which to understand what is working, what is not working and what is going on at local and national level. Recommendation 50 in the report—this pertains to what my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) said about accountability—is at the heart of the implementation challenges that we face. It states:

“The Department of Health and NHS England should require CCGs to publish data on levels of mental health spend in their Annual Report and Accounts, by condition and per capita, including for children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, from 2017/18 onwards. They should require CCGs to report on investment in mental health to demonstrate the commitment that commissioners must continue to increase investment in mental health services each year at a level which at least matches their overall allocation”

of funding. That goes to the heart of our data challenge.

For too long, mental health services have not been properly resourced because we do not have an effective data set on what is actually happening in the NHS or, as the report highlights, an effective model in the NHS for paying for mental health services. They tend to be commissioned on what is called a block contract basis, which often has the effect of focusing on the delivery of a low-cost service, rather than on quality outcomes. We certainly do not have a model of care that focuses on an individual care pathway or a cure for an individual patient.

We need a different model of payment for mental health services in the NHS that focuses on quality and outcomes and reflects our aspiration, which is written into the NHS’s operating mandate, for parity of esteem—the integration of physical and mental health. How can we express that aspiration? To give an example, if I suffer from diabetes and a serious mental health problem, my treatment in the national health service is effectively split in two: there is a physical health pathway, which is paid for in one way, and a mental health pathway, which is paid for in another way. I believe that we need to move towards a payment-by-activity model in the NHS that does not discriminate between physical and mental

health. That will certainly not happen overnight, but the report goes some way towards arguing for it in recommendation 47, which states:

“NHS England and NHS Improvement should together lead on costing, developing and introducing a revised payment system by 2017/18 to drive the whole system to improve outcomes”.

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend think it is right that we have a separate payment model for mental health, or should physical and mental health be treated together? Separating them could cause the very division that we are trying to lose.

**James Morris:** That is precisely what I am arguing for. Over time, we need to move to a model that does not discriminate between mental and physical health, with integrated payment reflecting the fact that there are a lot of conditions and a lot of comorbidity. Getting the payment system right in the NHS is fundamental to everything about the aspiration for parity of esteem. “Parity of esteem” is an interesting set of words, which can be interpreted to mean that we want a culture change or a system change—all of which is right—but to achieve it we need to change the payment model for how services are commissioned and purchased in the NHS.

**Rehman Chishti:** I agree with the model that my hon. Friend is proposing. From my discussions with the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which has backed a Bill on accountability, I believe that such a model would achieve a more holistic approach for patients, which can only be a good thing for outcomes.

**James Morris:** Again, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. The model contained in recommendation 47 and discussed in the report should drive the achievement of parity by moving towards an integrated tariff or pricing model. A lot of detailed work needs to be done to achieve that—I am not saying it is something that the Minister will be able to implement in the next week—but it goes, fundamentally, to the transformation argument that is at the centre of the report.

Perhaps most importantly, the report talks about the importance of, and absolute need for, strong leadership in the NHS and across Government to drive the change and to make things happen. This is not only about the NHS, but about the whole of Government; it is about putting mental health at the heart of our thinking in many different areas. We need a cross-Government approach, with a strong grip at the centre. I say that despite being someone who believes in devolution, because in mental health policy we have reached the stage of consensus, with much agreement about what needs to be done, but we need political will and a grip at the centre of Government to make things happen. The truth is that the existing system needs to be challenged. We need a culture of challenge—if we say that we are allocating money to mental health, why is it not being spent? Why is it not delivering the outcomes that we need?

As the report highlights, successful implementation is about not only co-ordinating our healthcare response but what we need to do on mental health in education, criminal justice and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) said,

[James Morris]

back to work programmes in the Home Office. Everything should be working together to achieve the goal of supporting the five-year transformation plan for mental health.

The last recommendation of the report, recommendation 58, might sound somewhat technical and bureaucratic, being a little obsessed with governance, but it is fundamental. It states:

“By no later than Summer 2016, NHS England, the Department of Health and the Cabinet Office should confirm what governance arrangements will be put in place to support the delivery of this strategy.”

That process of ensuring that the recommendations are followed through, that there is a performance and accountability framework, and that change is driven from the centre strikes me as fundamental.

The implementation challenges highlighted in the report are substantial and require action on multiple fronts. As I said earlier, the Minister has shown absolute commitment to addressing many of them. Will he give us an update on what progress has been made in the four areas that I have described today, namely commissioning, data and research, new payment mechanisms in the NHS and leadership in the NHS and across Government?

Getting this right is an historic opportunity. As I said at the beginning, to some degree the stars are aligned: we have a high-quality public debate; much more openness about mental health and its discussion; a mature debate on how we fund mental health; and political commitment at the highest level of Government, with the Prime Minister having made several speeches on and commitments about mental health in the past few months. We have the opportunity to drive forward what a 21st-century mental health care system should look like and make it deliver for all the people out there who need care and support. They are relying on the opportunity being realised and on us getting it right.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Phil Wilson (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call the first speaker, I will impose an informal time limit on speeches of five minutes, because so many people want to get in. Please will the next speaker and others keep within the timeframe, so that I do not have to reduce the time limit any more?

2.55 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson.

I thank the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) for setting out the framework of this excellent report by Paul Farmer and his taskforce on addressing concerns about mental health. What stood out for me was that it was a very practical report—with time lines and specificity about how the debate should be taken forward, the resources required and the instruments we put in place to make the report a reality—but the hon. Gentleman was absolutely right: it is important that it should be accountable at every step of its journey. I will come to that later.

The report also sets out a clear action plan for some of the areas that need a focus, including the setting of key targets. I welcome the ambition in the report to improve access to services and reach a much wider community than they do now. It sets out a new chapter in this journey about how we build capacity for mental health services in future. I doubt that there will be disagreement in the Chamber about some of the emphasis in the report on funding and the requirement to put more resources into the service. What stood out for me was the startling figure that poor mental health costs us, economically and socially, £105 billion, a figure that compares with only £34 billion being spent on the service.

There is a lot of opportunity to move the debate about funding and finances forward, as well as addressing issues to do with facilities. That has been a particular issue for us in York, as we have seen the closure of our acute service and the slow rebuilding of that service, with more emphasis on community delivery. It is important to ensure that we have the right number of beds as we put in a new facility for the people of our city. When we look at capacity issues, we should not look backwards at how a service was delivered, but look forward to the future needs and requirements of the service.

It is also important to reflect issues of workforce planning. We have seen a serious shortfall in people working across the mental health services. I welcome the recommended drive-up of, for example, 1,700 therapists. Will the Government be producing an action plan, as they did for health visiting, to ensure proper mentoring and support in the system to ensure that those therapists come online, while also ensuring a proper regulatory framework for the health professions across mental health? We do not have one currently, and I know that many of the professions are calling for proper regulation.

The other figure that really stood out for me concerned when people require support, with 50% of mental health problems established by age 14 and 75% by age 24. What stands out for me is the need to shift resources into early intervention and prevention services. I welcome the investment to be made into perinatal mental health, but we need to build up from those services, as we look at the provision that will be needed into the future.

In particular, if we are looking at that focus, I know from talking to teachers in my community that too much of the burden is being placed on them. We need to ensure that it shifts to the real professionals in the service, who are properly trained to provide support, diagnosis, signposting and screening for young people. There is urgent need to look across services for young people as they move out of school. We have also had specific issues with transition, and I still think there are cliff edges, as commissioning and service provision are done by different bodies. As a result, we get cliff edges—not smooth transition—based on a date of birth rather than clinical need. That really needs to be addressed.

In the short time remaining, I want to mention the raising of concerns in mental health services. The current system is quite inadequate—HealthWatch has contacted me today specifically about this issue. There are too many places where concerns can be raised. We have the Care Quality Commission and NHS Improvement; we also have regulators who look at the professions and other places, such as the healthcare safety investigation branch. There are so many different places. We need

one place where concerns can be raised, so that service users and staff know where to go and can get a clear response. I hope the Minister will address that as well.

3 pm

**Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson, and to speak in the debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) for bringing the debate, for his continued advocacy of the needs of mental health patients and for pushing continually during his time in the House on an important issue in ensuring that we hold our Government and NHS providers to account, so that genuine parity of esteem is delivered for mental health patients.

In the brief time available, I want to talk about a few points raised in the mental health taskforce's good report, focusing on the need for more holistic care and joining up physical and mental healthcare for people with mental illness. I want to talk about access to care, recognising that some people struggle to access physical healthcare owing to their ethnicity or because English is not their first language. Such problems are compounded for those who have mental illness. I will also focus on some of the challenges in joining up what is a very fragmented health and care system, particularly for people with complex and enduring mental illness.

On holistic care, we know that somebody who is mentally unwell and has a chronic and enduring or severe and enduring mental illness can live a life up to 20 years shorter than somebody without that mental illness. That fact alone makes the point that we need to join up physical and mental healthcare better. My hon. Friend talked about a patient with diabetes. Such a patient may well develop diabetes because they are mentally unwell and do not have the right physical healthcare and support, or they may develop it as a side effect of some of the medication they are taking. We know that antipsychotic medications, for example, are linked with high cholesterol and developing diabetes.

We need to do much more to join up physical and mental healthcare. It is quite frankly scandalous and wrong that someone who is mentally unwell has a 20-year shorter life expectancy than someone who does not have that condition. That is something we must focus on and get right. We need to improve the physical and mental healthcare services for those with chronic and enduring mental illness.

We talked a little about the commissioning opportunities in that, and we must recognise that, at a local level, despite the Government's best intentions, commissioners do not often put additional money into mental health services. Certainly in Suffolk, which I represent, the NHS funding increases—small though they may be—went largely to physical health and local CCGs failed to increase the money going to mental health conditions adequately.

The question is: how do we improve holistic care and join up physical and mental healthcare for those with long-term mental illness? We can and must learn lessons from the care in the community programme in the 1980s. The purpose of the programme—to deliver more care in the community and move away from the old asylums—was right, but the programme was not properly

resourced. We must face up to that. Also, a lot of the money freed up by that was swallowed up by the physical healthcare sector and did not go into mental healthcare in the community. If we are talking about putting all the money for physical and mental healthcare in one place, we have to be careful that, by doing what sounds like a good thing, we do not effectively end up propping up the acute provider sector, which already consumes 55% of the NHS budget—that figure has risen over the last five years, as the Minister will be aware—and inadvertently further disadvantage mental healthcare, which receives only around 10% of NHS funding.

It may be appropriate—the report touches upon the importance of this—to improve liaison services on both sides of the divide between physical and mental healthcare. We could improve psychiatric liaison services for people with complex physical healthcare problems or enduring physical illnesses and, for people with long-term and enduring mental illness, we could improve medical liaison services in hospitals and properly involve and support physical healthcare in the community through GPs. I will not expand on that, as I do not have very long, but I would be grateful if the Minister responded to that point.

On access to services, we have to recognise that there is a fragmented care environment, in particular for people with chronic and enduring mental illness. Addressing that is not just about providing money for the health service, but about having appropriate housing—we know there is a shortage of appropriate housing to look after people with mental ill health in areas such as London—and dealing with the challenges in delivering proper social services care for such people. We also have to recognise that the state is often the only mechanism of support for such people. The only people caring for some of the poorest and most disadvantaged people in our society—people with long-term mental illness—work for the state; they are NHS and council workers. Unless we properly value and recognise their roles and properly fund—and increase funding—in a holistic, meaningful and long-term way, we will be unable to deliver the care that we need. There needs to be more money, more key workers and joined-up physical and mental healthcare. I endorse a lot of what the report says and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

3.6 pm

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) and thank him for all the work he has done in advocating for mental health. I also congratulate Paul Farmer, Jacqui Dyer and their whole team on their substantial piece of work.

This is a historic injustice. The disadvantage suffered by people with mental ill health in accessing treatment is not the responsibility of any particular Government; it has always been there, but the report gives us the opportunity to end that historic injustice, and we have an absolute responsibility to ensure that that happens. It is both morally wrong and economically stupid to ignore mental ill health. The case is made so well on page 5 of the report, where it says:

“Those with conduct disorder—persistent, disobedient, disruptive and aggressive behaviour—are twice as likely to leave school without any qualifications, three times more likely to become a teenage parent, four times more likely to become dependent on

[Norman Lamb]

drugs and 20 times more likely to end up in prison. Yet most children and young people get no support. Even for those that do the average wait for routine appointments for psychological therapy was 32 weeks in 2015/16.”

That encapsulates the problem. It is scandalous that children with such needs do not get access to treatment. It destroys their life chances, and the cost to society of the outcomes described in the report is enormous.

I am conscious of the time available to me, so rather than highlight a number of issues from the report I will address some key points directly to the Minister. First, we know that there will be £1 billion of additional funding, but it is due to come late in this Parliament. Between now and then, the NHS Confederation believes that mental health will lose out on funding and that in 2016-17 the bulk of the front-loaded money will go to acute hospitals. I have a real concern that the ambition in this document will not be realised unless that investment is made. Will the Minister ensure that that investment is delivered?

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Norman Lamb:** I do not have time; I want to ensure that others can speak.

Secondly, there needs to be a clear implementation plan—others, including the Royal College of Psychiatrists and NHS Providers, have made this point. We need to understand exactly the practical mechanism for making these things happen. NHS providers say the plan should be delivered by August of this year. Can the Minister confirm that that will happen and that there will be reporting back on progress, so that we understand exactly what is happening? We need proper governance arrangements to make sure that these things happen.

Thirdly, the report endorses the approach that I took of implementing comprehensive maximum waiting times standards. That is an essential component of achieving equality—an equal right to treatment on time, whether someone has a physical or mental health problem. The Government have endorsed the report, yet there is no funding attached to ensuring we get comprehensive waiting times standards. How will the Government ensure that that happens? It is fundamental to ensuring that we end the historic injustice.

I am delighted that there is now a commitment to end the outrageous practice of out-of-area-placements. It is outdated, it treats people appallingly, and we know that there is a higher risk of suicide among people who end up being sent out of area. To do it by 2020 takes too long. The Royal College of Psychiatrists report—Lord Crisp’s report—says it could be done by October next year, so I urge the Minister to follow that timescale. Will he also commit to implementing all the recommendations in Lord Crisp’s report, which has been widely welcomed? Everyone recognises that it makes sense, so I hope he will confirm that.

There is a responsibility on all of us to ensure that we do everything we can to implement the recommendations. I chair a commission on mental health in the west midlands. Is the Minister interested in a briefing on the

progress we are making? There is a real opportunity to implement early some of the recommendations in the report.

Finally, I will make the case for preventive healthcare. Relate, the organisation, has made a powerful case for the value of couple therapy and ensuring that every provider of IAPT—improving access to psychological therapies—provides that among the other evidence-based interventions.

3.12 pm

**Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) on securing this important debate and affording us the opportunity to look more closely at the excellent mental health taskforce report.

I want to highlight some issues from the report. First, I completely agree that more children and young people should benefit from an increase in high-quality mental health support when they need it. The pressures on young people in today’s climate have too often been ignored. Social media, education, home life and even peer pressure have an astounding effect on young people. Those are just a few everyday factors that are often overlooked and may result in young people suffering in silence.

The report’s recommendations would give individuals the support that they need to overcome their difficulties and continue to develop their talents throughout their education, and subsequently their employment. Crucial to tackling mental health illness across the UK is the need to tackle individuals’ problems at an early age, and certainly when the first warning signs are elicited.

The second point I want to touch on is the NHS’s approach to identifying what steps services should take to ensure that all deaths by suicide across NHS-funded mental health settings are learned from to prevent repeat events. The NHS would be wise to learn from previous events, and it must ensure that the right investment is provided to help prevent people from taking their own lives. I know what it feels like to lose someone to suicide, including for the family.

The figures in the report also strike a note with me. It states:

“A quarter of people who took their own life had been in contact with a health professional, usually their GP, in the last week before they died.”

Indeed, when my cousin took his life, he was in contact with a GP and awaiting counselling. Even if we could save only one life, that would be one less family who would have to experience the heartbreak of losing a loved one. I am therefore pleased to hear that the recommendations outline a system in which more will be done to help GPs further understand the issues surrounding mental health. That will hopefully help to reduce the number of people who take their own life even having seen a healthcare professional in the weeks leading up to their death.

I was recently appointed to the position of rapporteur on mental health to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and the first area I will be reporting on is self-inflicted deaths in custody among 18 to 24-year-olds. The taskforce report touches on the issue of mental

health in prisons and in the time following release from prison. There is no denying that prison should be a punishment. However, the criminal justice system is a difficult place for people with mental health issues, and I welcome the proposals to improve mental health provision both for those currently serving a prison sentence and those who have recently been released. We need to ensure that we provide the appropriate support to help ease people back into society and help them forge a life away from crime.

Nine years ago today, my mum died at the age of 67, having fought all her life against mental health issues—she was in and out of several institutions—and it strikes me that we could have had her for another 12 years had some recommendations in the report been adhered to.

The NHS taskforce report covers many aspects of mental health, which is an issue that is impossible to address overnight. We need a strong, detailed and considered plan of action to be implemented over the coming years. The Government have highlighted mental health as a key priority, and I hope that by working with the NHS and the organisations and charities at the heart of mental health, we can produce an effective plan to improve mental health provision across the UK.

3.16 pm

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) on securing today's debate on the excellent report from the independent mental health taskforce to the NHS in England. I reiterate many of the comments made so far, especially those about housing, jobs and the immediate environment in which someone lives. My constituency has shocking health inequalities, and improving all those things could lead to good mental health.

The report contains a series of recommendations that, if implemented in full, will lead to the introduction of essential reforms and the additional investment that our mental health services desperately need and people with mental health problems undoubtedly deserve. To understand why we need this fundamental step change in mental health provision in this country, we need look no further than the human and economic costs associated with the poor mental healthcare that has far too often been the norm.

The human costs are self-evident. They can be counted among the many vulnerable people with mental health problems who have been left to suffer in silence, with no help at all, stigmatised and shunted to the margins of society, their lives simply put on hold or irrevocably changed and ruined. I am talking about the many people for whom mental health provision has for too long been a second-rate, second-class service, and those who have been let down by the inadequacies of a system that is supposed to be there to support and care for them yet treats their body and their mind unequally. Regrettably, that has all too often been the reality for far too many people, simply because the way we think about and treat mental illness in this country has been woefully inadequate.

I reiterate that there are economic costs to such neglect, which are as unsustainable as the human costs are unacceptable. Failing to address mental illness through

poor care has been a significant problem for decades in this country and costs the economy, the NHS and society dear. The taskforce's report makes it clear that the economic cost is estimated to be £105 billion a year, as we have already heard. To address the challenges, we must, as the taskforce recommends, seek to transform services and support for people with mental health problems and ensure that everybody gets the right help at the right time, in the right place and from the right people.

Similarly, we must ensure that mental health is recognised as a priority for the NHS, Government, businesses, schools and society as a whole. That will enable us to promote good mental health, prevent poor mental health and respond effectively when mental health problems occur. If we are truly to achieve the ambition of parity of esteem for mental and physical health in the NHS we must, as a first step, ensure that the taskforce's recommendations are delivered and funded in full. Transforming the way we deal with mental health is an enormous challenge, I know that, but one that we, as a country and a society, must tackle head-on for the future.

3.20 pm

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) on securing the debate. It was a pleasure to listen to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and the Minister speaking at the launch of the mental health taskforce report last month.

Since I was elected, constituents' concerns about mental health provision have caused me to immerse myself in the issue and further my education on this most harrowing of subjects. I want to focus on concerns about early-stage treatment for young people. At Prime Minister's questions recently, I mentioned visiting three families in one day in my constituency, each of whom had a child who they felt had not been given the early-stage intervention that they expected by child and adolescent mental health services. I asked the Prime Minister for more focus on early-stage treatment, so that young people do not find their condition becoming more acute. I work closely with my local CAMHS team, and I have the highest regard for the many excellent specialists who do their best. However, it is of concern to me that constituents face lengthy waiting times and that some have been moved from pillar to post when receiving treatment.

Building up trust is a key ingredient in successful diagnosis and treatment. I hear stories about young people finding the courage and trust to open up about their condition only to find that there is a new practitioner at the subsequent session, and it disappoints me to find that the young person has then regressed because of the change in personnel. I would like a commitment to treatment being given on a fixed one-to-one basis. If we can do that for maternity provision, surely we can do it for mental health treatment.

At the mental health taskforce launch, I was buoyed by the commitment by the Minister and the chief executive of NHS England to implement the excellent report. I pay tribute to the chief executive of Mind, Paul Farmer,

[*Huw Merriman*]

and his team for the review. An aspect of it that cheered me was the commitment to funds to ensure that our non-mental health NHS hospitals have adequate mental health expertise on site to deal with those who are hospitalised as a result of mental health issues or who have such a condition in addition to a physical illness. What drove my concern about that was the experience of a family in my constituency following a suicide attempt. The NHS staff did not have the ability to deal with the mental health condition and my constituent, a young man, was forced to wait until CAMHS staff could make their way over from another town miles away. I understand the need for specialist treatment, but it strikes me that there is a need for a culture change across the NHS, and that all staff should be trained to understand mental health and provide a basic level of treatment in the area. Specialisation in health is important, but if the NHS becomes overly specialised it can lead to a lack of general involvement in care for patients in such areas.

I welcome the news that the Government will fund 24/7 mental health provision in our hospitals, but I was somewhat alarmed at the suggestion by my local trust that the funding may not stretch far enough. I also want to ensure that that specific coverage will not mean that other NHS staff with the necessary levels of technical understanding and empathy feel that they are not empowered to help the many patients in hospital who need help with their mental health care in addition to their physical wellbeing.

Getting early-stage intervention right is a key part of getting proper diagnosis for people with a mental health condition and lessening the chances of acute difficulties. It is the most important investment not only for people's welfare and wellbeing but to enable young people to fulfil their hopes and dreams in their careers and make something for themselves and their country. We should not misdiagnose young people who are suffering growing pains, and who need families' and friends' coaching and guidance to overcome the problems of adolescence. However, I have met too many young children who face a difficult future because their mental health condition was not treated at an early stage. I applaud the report and the Government's response. They are leading the charge to ensure that we can support all who are affected by this terrible condition. I look forward to a better mental health service in the years to come.

3.24 pm

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. Congratulations are due to my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) on securing the debate.

The report is very important. In the short time available I want to touch on two problems that people with mental health issues have, which the report focuses on and which many of us will have encountered in our constituencies. If people are young their problems are with schooling, family disruption and access to services. If they are older they may struggle to get work. There is often a lack of support to enable people with mental health issues who are in work to keep their job, and a lack of employers who understand the often sporadic nature of mental illnesses.

I am a patron of Mind in mid-Hertfordshire and a supporter of its "Time to Talk" campaign, and I welcome the investment in talking therapies discussed in the report. However, the employment rate for people with mental health issues is still far too low. In 2012 I and, I am sure, many other Members of Parliament, supported the "Way to Work" campaign that Mind championed. I presented a little trophy to an employer that took on employees with mental health conditions, but sadly the take-up among employers in St Albans was very low, and nothing further happened.

It is worrying that too many companies find ways not to employ someone with mental health issues, particularly if an episode of ill health has resulted in absenteeism. I would like to know what more the Government can do to work with employers and show them how they can manage a workforce in which there may be mental health issues in much the same way as they would if there were people with disabilities. I do not think enough is done to bring people into the workforce and show how they can be supported in their periods of good health and ill health.

On the subject of young people, I have been told of people having trouble in dealing with CAMHS. A recurrent theme is having sporadic meetings with a lot of different people. I learned of the sad case of a very young lad who experienced extreme mental health problems. He had problems going to school, and in the end it became too difficult for him to get there. With regard to getting home schooling, he has almost dropped off the teaching rota. The lad is housebound because of his severe anxiety. There is not enough support for his parents, or for other families with young people living with mental health issues. The mother had to give up work, and the family could never go anywhere. They could not go on holiday. There was no real support for the family in their situation. We need a more holistic approach that deals with the family rather than just treating the young person with the mental health issues.

I have a few questions for the Minister. What will the Government do to improve access to talking therapies and specialist back to work support for older people who have mental health problems? What more is being done to help people find and stay in work? What more is the Department for Work and Pensions doing to integrate services for young people, to make sure that when they have problems with the education system and getting access to services, they get the right information in a timely fashion? If someone recovers from a mental illness that they had when young, whether that was self-harming or, as in the case I mentioned, agoraphobia, they may be set up for a life of failure because their education went out of the window during a formative period.

What more can be done to help people who had mental ill health when they were younger and did not have a good experience in the education system? What more can be done to support them to get their lives back on track when their mental health improves? I would like a co-ordinated approach. At whatever age a person presents with mental illness, they should be assessed holistically. If there have been gaps in their training to get into work or in their education, extra resources must be put in to ensure that when they are well, they can move on with their lives like the rest of us. That would be much like our approach to people in prisons, who often have mental health issues.

We are subjecting many young people to a life in prison if we do not allow them to be trained up and get the help they need. Otherwise, they will end up in a life of crime, because when they leave school or are at school leaving age they will have little to offer any employer. We need to ensure that those people's lives are not snuffed out and wasted at an early age, and that they have the chance to form a life for themselves and their families.

3.30 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) on bringing this important and timely debate to Westminster Hall.

Although the report pertains to NHS England, the Scottish National party very much welcomes it. It is an opportunity to share best practice recommendations right across the UK. I would like to declare an interest: I worked in mental health as a psychologist for 20 years prior to coming to the House. I am particularly glad that the report has been produced. It is excellent, and I commend the work of those involved. The report is detailed, thorough and, importantly, based on inclusivity and service users' views. It addresses key issues of prevention, access and parity.

In terms of prevention, we know that half of mental health issues are established by the age of 14, and three quarters by the age of 24. A new focus on young people and effective interventions designed for that age group via CAMHS are clearly required. More widely, we should look at mental health awareness training for teachers, so that we can pick up on early warning signs and refer on. Mental wellbeing could also be part of the curriculum, so that young people can develop positive, adaptive coping strategies, which are key to preventing the onset of mental illness.

We are dealing with the young generation, so the use of technology and modalities that young people like and use—for example, apps, which I am not particularly familiar with—will be really important. We have to get up to speed. Evidence-based interventions are required in particular for self-harm, eating and conduct disorders, depression and anxiety, which are common problems within the younger age group.

I welcome the fact that crisis teams will be locally based, 24/7, but I wonder if we could have some more detail. Will that involve specialist clinicians, nurses or doctors on call in each area who are trained in working with young people? More widely, in order that people present, should we have more public health awareness campaigns to reduce stigma?

Mental health care needs to be targeted across the lifespan, from younger people in CAMHS to adults and older adults. The report establishes that 40% of older adults in care homes are affected by depression, yet I read little information in the report about services provided or required for older adults, who may have co-morbid dementia, physical frailty or have suffered stroke, adjustment problems or loss. That area needs some more work and detail. Access to psychological therapies in the community, in hospital and in residential care appear to be key. Experts in

psychological therapy for older adults are likely to be required, because people will be working with complex presentations.

I welcome the taskforce report's recommendation of an integrated approach, looking at housing, employment, social needs and physical health. That suggests the need for integrated and holistic assessments in mental health, as well as in physical health settings. We need a formulation-driven approach, with an understanding of the precipitants, problems and exacerbating factors, but also of the protective factors. All those factors need to be targeted and integrated into treatment, in order to evidence improvement. Fundamentally, we are talking about a biopsychosocial approach, which means a change in assessment procedures across the system. We will have to evidence how that will happen and how it will be implemented across both mental and physical healthcare, but it links well to the integration agenda of health and social care.

I caution that although obtaining work is a very positive step in reducing depression for many people, pushing someone who is acutely unwell into work will invariably set them back, so this is about clinical judgment and timing. One of the major differences since I began working in the NHS more than 20 years ago is that there are now waiting time initiatives in Scotland and across the UK. That is significant. It challenges services to focus, and monitoring leads to an improvement in standards, but it must have ongoing underlying investment.

I welcome the recommendation that crisis care be provided 24/7. However, that will require specialists to be trained to work with individuals who have co-morbid substance abuse and mental illness problems. All too often, people are turned away because they are intoxicated at hospital when they present. I understand that it is difficult to properly assess people in that condition, but unfortunately research indicates that that may be when they are at highest risk of suicidal behaviour and at their most impulsive.

I particularly welcome access to psychological therapy for new mothers. One in five have depression, which impacts on the self, the family and the baby. I also suggest the extension of counselling to those who have suffered miscarriage or stillbirth, and who experience great trauma in that regard.

I am unsure of the fit of the recommendation on specialist GPs from my reading of the report. Does that mean treatment through minimal interventions or assessment by GPs? Does it mean specialist nursing staff in GP surgeries who could engage in treatment? My concern is about the cost-effectiveness of GPs engaging in therapeutic work, but training and assessment at a primary care level is a welcome idea.

The report highlights that nine out of 10 people in prison have mental health problems or drug or alcohol misuse issues, but it does not clarify how recommendations on criminal justice will be implemented. Cross-party and cross-Government agreement on how to implement the recommendations will be required across the country. Is it about access to psychologists in prisons? Again, more thought is needed on the detail of integration.

I will sum up, because I am running out of time and I want the Minister to be able to respond. I am pleased to see the inclusion of technology in the report, which I believe will be one of the key issues in transforming

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

mental healthcare. The use of Skype, email and online treatment packages can increase access and links to therapists and improve access for rural communities.

Data collection is excellent. We need it, and we need to evidence outcomes and waiting times, but I appeal for balance. Drowning mental health staff in paperwork is not the answer. That reduces time for clinical work and time with patients, and we do not want this to become a tick-box exercise.

In conclusion, there is much to welcome. There is much to do. We need more strategy on integration plans. We need more detail on older adults and criminal justice. I was not able to touch on learning disability today, but that is another area to be considered. We do not want a postcode lottery, so it is important to look at local commissioning and share best practice, to ensure high-quality mental healthcare across the UK.

3.39 pm

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Wilson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) both on securing this vital debate on the final report of the independent taskforce on mental health and on his excellent contribution. I am pleased that we have the opportunity to examine this incredibly important piece of work and to hear a detailed response from the Government. I thank all Members who have spoken in the debate; the quality of the speeches we have heard is testimony of the strength of feeling on both sides of the House on the issue of mental health.

I echo previous contributions today in saying that the taskforce report is an extremely comprehensive piece of work. I pay tribute to all those who were involved in delivering it. The recommendations it makes are robust and wide-reaching and signal what the chair of the taskforce—Paul Farmer CBE from Mind—has rightly described as a

“landmark moment for mental health”.

I also thank vice-chair Jacqui Dyer for her commitment and passion.

If implemented in full, the changes could make a huge difference to a system that is under increasing and unsustainable pressure. The real challenge lying before us now is ensuring that the aspirations set out in the report are actually delivered. For too long the rhetoric on mental health has not matched the reality on the ground. Members today have reflected the concerns felt by the people whom we represent across the country—people who themselves suffer from mental health conditions, their families and the services and professionals that care for them—who are anxious to ensure that the opportunity we now have to transform mental health in our country is not wasted.

I will focus my remarks on implementation and three key areas where unanswered questions remain—funding, transparency and accountability. Turning first to the money, the taskforce identified a £1.2 billion funding gap in mental health services each year by 2020. The Government responded to the publication of the report with an announcement of an additional £1 billion of investment for mental health services up to 2020. That is,

of course, very welcome but I understand that the £1 billion will be taken from the £8 billion set aside for the NHS up to 2020. If that is the case—perhaps the Minister can confirm that for us today—I struggle to see how it will meet what the taskforce says is required.

Given that mental health receives just under 10% of the total NHS budget, it is difficult to see how the funding announced could be considered as additional, particularly in the context of the £600 million cut that mental health trusts have experienced over the course of the last Parliament. I should have thought that the Minister would have allocated that proportion of the £8 billion to mental health anyway, so I am keen to hear his response on that point.

There are also real concerns about how this funding will be distributed and what systems will be in place to ensure that it reaches the front-line services for which it is intended and not siphoned off to plug the deficits of acute trusts. That point has already been made by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). The Minister is right to prescribe that CCGs must increase the amount of their budget that they allocate to mental health at a rate that is at least in line with the general growth in their budget. However, as that budget information is not published centrally, I have yet to see any evidence from the Government that they are able to guarantee that CCGs are fulfilling that commitment. In fact, I have had to make freedom of information requests, which have exposed the fact that more than one in three CCGs are not meeting that expectation.

Just before Christmas, the Health Secretary announced that from June there will be independently assured Ofsted-style ratings for mental health provision by CCG area that will expose the areas that are not making the commitment to mental health that they should. I asked then if he would clarify whether that commitment would include publishing a clear picture of mental health spending for every CCG. I am still awaiting a response to the follow-up letter I wrote seeking clarification on that very important point, and I would be pleased if the Minister were able to confirm that for us today. As he will know, the Opposition strongly believe that the annual survey of investment in mental health must be reinstated. It was stopped in 2011, and it is an absolutely crucial piece of information.

That is especially important given the concerns that have been raised not only by many hon. Members today, but by the Mental Health Network, which represents mental health trusts, who have said that providers of mental health services are yet to see the difference from the investment in child and adolescent mental health services that the Government announced last year. During this debate, many hon. Members have raised specific concerns about CAMHS and the imbalance in the amount that they are allocated from the overall mental health budget. It is less than 10%, and it is a significant challenge. I am interested to hear the Minister's response both to those very serious concerns and to the proposal from many mental health leaders that the cash should be ring-fenced—I am very keen to hear what he thinks about that.

That brings me to the second key theme of the report—the startling lack of transparency and accountability in our mental health system, which was

mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti). The significant gaps in the information that the Government collect on mental health present a significant obstacle to their ability to deliver what they have promised on mental health. On Monday we saw further shocking evidence of that information gap during the BBC's "Panorama" programme, which highlighted the discrepancy between the data that the Government hold on the number of children who have died in in-patient mental health trusts and units and the figures from the charity Inquest's research. I raised that in the House yesterday.

**Norman Lamb:** I totally agree with the point that the hon. Lady is making. I always took the view that I was operating in a fog, without access to the proper data. The "Panorama" programme made reference to the fact that I gave a parliamentary answer saying there had been no deaths in children's mental health services—an answer that was wrong, because I was given the wrong information. I have asked the Secretary of State for a full investigation into how that happened. We have to have absolutely accurate reporting of these things.

**Luciana Berger:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I believe it is absolutely imperative that we are able to see how deaths in psychiatric care are not only treated and recorded, but investigated and learned from. We have heard from the Minister that there will be progress on that front.

The situation is particularly concerning given the ongoing case of Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust, which was found to have failed to investigate more than 1,000 unexpected deaths of mental health and learning disability patients since 2011. Only last week, more than two years since the very tragic death of Connor Sparrowhawk, Southern Health trust was found by the Care Quality Commission not to have addressed serious concerns that were raised about the safety of its patients and was issued with a warning notice. I would be grateful if the Minister shared with us what the Government are doing specifically to improve the mental health data that are being collected, published and made accessible to the public. When will we have a further update on avoidable deaths in the area of mental health and learning disability? Data are absolutely critical, not only to enable the Government to understand the realities of what is happening on the ground, but to allow us to check that the Government are delivering on what they have promised.

That brings me to the final point I wish to cover today—accountability for the implementation of the taskforce's recommendations. The taskforce asked NHS England, the Department of Health and the Cabinet Office to announce what governance methods they intend to introduce for the delivery of the recommendations. That really is needed as a matter of urgency. We need greater transparency than before in the way that the recommendations are implemented. I note that one recommendation of the taskforce report is that the Government accept the recommendations from the previous taskforce on CAMHS—another issue raised by many Members during today's debate—which reflects the fact that the delivery of these recommendations has been too slow. I should be grateful if the Minister would

confirm what plans there are to publish and publicise updates on implementation of the taskforce's recommendations.

The Centre for Mental Health has produced a fantastic report for NHS England, exploring what helps and what hinders the implementation of policies and strategies relating to mental health. I do not know whether the Minister has had a chance to read the report but, among other things, it calls for a robust implementation infrastructure to support local agencies in delivering the report's recommendations. I should be grateful if the Minister would share with us today what plans there are to support local authorities, CCGs and mental health trusts to deliver on that strategy.

Many recommendations in the taskforce report also require Government Departments—such as the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education—to deliver their own areas of work that relate to mental health. I was very pleased to see those recommendations, and as I have said and will continue to say, we will not address the challenges of our nation's mental health just from the Department of Health. Prevention and early intervention are absolutely crucial, which was a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher).

Take the work of the Ministry of Justice, for example. The report calls for the completion of the roll-out of liaison and diversion services, as well as the increased uptake of mental health treatment requirements and improvements to prison mental health care. At a time when, as a country, we are seeing one person take their life every four days in our prisons, it is absolutely crucial that we address this very serious issue.

Another point made by the taskforce was about housing and the local housing allowance, which the Government seriously need to address. During today's debate other Members have talked about the importance of employment and what more needs to be done to support employers to help people with mental health conditions into the workforce, and to support people who might be experiencing those issues. It was disappointing that the Government accepted only formally the taskforce's recommendations relating to the Department of Health and its arm's length bodies. I hope the Minister will confirm today whether other Departments will accept and implement the other recommendations.

In conclusion, for the many thousands of people who could benefit from these changes and the others set out in the taskforce's final report, Ministers must keep their promise and deliver the vital reforms that are long overdue and desperately needed. We have heard a lot of rhetoric and warm words on mental health. Now is the time for real action and to translate parity of esteem into reality. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

3.50 pm

**The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) for this debate.

Among several impossible jobs I have, responding to a debate of this quality in 10 minutes simply cannot be done, so in accordance with my normal practice, if I do

[*Alistair Burt*]

not answer any question, I will write to the hon. Member and, with colleagues' permission, I will link the questions so that everyone gets the same letter, so that virtually everyone who has spoken will get a letter. I will put a copy in the Library so that other colleagues can see it.

There are many things on which there is no disagreement. To give some one-liners, My hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) said that we now deal with mental and physical illness in an holistic way; that is absolutely right and ensures that money goes to the right place. I will cover that later, but no one disagrees.

On psychiatric liaison, we are on to that. The importance of housing and so on is now understood as part of dealing with mental illness.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis spoke about valuing the public sector; yes, that is not said often enough and it is vital to do. The right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) spoke of the economic case for dealing with mental illness. No one now disagrees with that. The priority that the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) mentioned is absolutely right, and when it comes to waiting times, we are on to those. We are funding waiting times differently from when the right hon. Gentleman set them up, but they are being funded and I am happy to write to him separately on that. His worry is not shared in the Department and I can clear that up.

We are accepting the taskforce's recommendation that we act on out-of-area placements by 2021. I would like to do it sooner if possible. I am determined to do it, but it takes time and the attitude to tier 4 will need to change. My recent experience in Hull showed me how inept current NHS processes are in deciding where new tier 4 beds should be. The situation is unacceptable and they have got themselves into a complete mess. That must change and be done properly, and I am determined it will be.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) rightly spoke about the importance of early intervention, as did the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell). I pay tribute to the knowledge and work of the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) in this area. Perinatal care is very much on everyone's agenda.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) talked about the importance of work. There is now a joint unit between the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions to do more of that. A White Paper or Green Paper is expected later this year and will show its importance.

On the importance of young people, the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow mentioned our work with the Department for Education on new technology, apps and earlier intervention. She is absolutely right.

I do not want to dwell on any of those matters, although I could spend 10 minutes on each, but we have all grasped how important they are. I would like to respond to the key issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis and the

hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). I can cover transparency and implementation right up front.

I thank Paul Farmer, Jacqui Dyer and colleagues for their very important report. I am determined that it will not gather dust and as a way forward I have suggested—and we will do it—that an implementation plan is published by the end of the summer. I am not sure whether that will be in August, but it will be by the end of the summer. It will detail how we intend to implement the recommendation. There will not be one response; there will be a series of responses, and there will be a website where people can see what is being done and monitor what is planned. It will be transparent. There will be monitoring by all those who have been engaged but there will be constant reference back to the taskforce's work, so that people can see that what is being done is related to that. The Department is putting in place a robust process with people to monitor it. That is how we will do it.

I want to cover the cross-Government issues not by interministerial committee, but by way of bilaterals with colleagues to drive things forward. I think that is the right way to do that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis mentioned data, particularly in the context in which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree mentioned them. I think there is recognition that the way in which data have been collected in the past has not been good enough, and there is also recognition that we are trying to lever up standards in all places. The "Panorama" programme and the hon. Lady's questions over a period exposed the difficulty of getting all the data in the right place. This needs a separate debate and a separate set of answers. I have put in place an investigation into where the deficiencies in the data are, and how data that are collected elsewhere but centrally can be brought together. That will not be necessary in some cases and a written question may not provide all the answers.

In relation to the matters raised in "Panorama" on Monday and the difficulty for the right hon. Member for North Norfolk, it should be possible to answer the question. The problem is in terminology and deciding at what point a young person might be in the mental health system. I have agreed to meet Deborah Coles of INQUEST to talk about the information they have gathered. Plainly, it cannot be right that one Minister says "none", I say "one", the NHS says "four" and INQUEST says "nine". That cannot be fair to the people involved.

A lot of attention is paid to the death of any young person with mental health problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway) raised this in a personal context. I can reassure colleagues. There are serious incident reviews, a child death overview panel, and the Care Quality Commission is involved.

**Oliver Colvile:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Alistair Burt:** If my hon. Friend will forgive me on this occasion, there is just too much to cover in a short period.

There is a national confidential inquiry into suicide and homicide by people with mental illness and the Office for National Statistics is involved. Unfortunately,

there is a gap in the data between national and local sources due to commission arrangements changing. That is an explanation; it is not an excuse or an answer, so my officials are looking urgently into how we can make sure our data collection is more unified and that we are working collaboratively with INQUEST to make sure we get an accurate number and resolve any discrepancies. Most importantly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis said, we must make sure we learn from every tragedy so that we can apply the learning to make things better. We are on to that. I promise the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree that I will find a way of responding to the House to put that right. I will be in touch with her further.

I thank my hon. Friend for his work with the all-party mental health group. He and other colleagues have been responsible for raising these issues over a period.

A figure from the National Institute of Health Research indicates that it spent £72.6 million on mental health research programmes in 2014-15, which in terms of particular research is £27.7 million higher than in any other disease area, including cancer. We are determined to do more research, but I am not convinced the figures are quite as bad as people say. None the less, we need data and we need research. Again, the taskforce is right. The Department has accepted all the taskforce's recommendations.

I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a need for better commissioning. We are changing the tariff terms. He said it could not be done from tomorrow, but it is being done from April 2017. To end the block payments, there will be two new payment approaches with two different tariffs. I agree with him on leadership.

The funding will be there, but it must build up over time. The money is being delivered through the spending review and how we intend to fund the national health service generally. The commitment for the £1 billion of extra funding the taskforce asked for is very important and I believe it will make a significant difference.

Commitment, money and determination from the whole of Parliament will be of huge importance in this area and I thank colleagues for their engagement.

3.59 pm

**James Morris:** I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for taking part in this debate. We have got to the stage of knowing where the problem is and what the solutions are. We need the will in Government and across Parliament to make them happen. We owe that to all the people out there who are relying on us to get this right and I think the stars are aligned to make it happen. Let us get it right.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the report from the independent mental health taskforce to the NHS in England.

4 pm

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

## Personal Independence Payments

[STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

4.11 pm

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to be in a debate that you are chairing, Mr McCabe—I think this is the first time it has happened for me. I apologise to all my colleagues because I have a great deal to say on the issue, and I propose to say it and then, hopefully, to take some interventions. I am very grateful to them for attending to listen to the debate, which has provoked an awful lot of interest not just from fellow colleagues, but from individuals who have contacted me. I thank all the people and organisations who have contacted me; I have read all the submissions they sent.

The Government's present agenda on disability is to reduce the number of people receiving disability benefits and the amount of money they receive. There has been a marked increase in the number of constituents coming to my office to seek help in connection with disability benefits, particularly with the personal independence payment process. In preparing for this debate, I have worked very closely with, and I am very grateful to, Wrexham citizens advice bureau and the welfare rights service of Wrexham Council.

In recent months, it seems that the Department for Work and Pensions has targeted the Wrexham postcode, inviting large numbers of working age, pre-existing disability living allowance claimants to move to the replacement benefit, PIP. Failure to respond to the invitation results in the existing DLA award ceasing, with an associated knock-on loss of any premiums—for example, means-tested benefits, Motability car tax, blue badge entitlement and so on. At any time in the Wrexham area, about 10,000 people have been in receipt of various combinations and levels of DLA, and considerable numbers of them are now going through the migration process, which is almost entirely driven by DWP, not by the claimants themselves.

The DWP invitation gives people a limited amount of time to claim PIP and return the paperwork, with a claim form of about 40 pages in length. Many claimants struggle to complete social security benefits claim forms and seek help to do so. If constituents do not respond, the DLA stops. That is one way of the Government achieving their objective to reduce the benefit paid.

One constituent of mine—a former nurse—has a degenerative neurological condition, yet her PIP assessment resulted in her losing her Motability car, an outcome repeated and experienced by sufferers of Parkinson's disease, according to a briefing sent to me before this debate. This does, of course, secure the Government's objective of reducing the benefit paid to disabled people.

The changes to the system are being made against a backdrop of withdrawing specific benefits advice, reductions in legal aid eligibility and reductions in funding for citizens advice bureaux, welfare rights advisers and other sources of advice. The result is that little advice is available for vulnerable people, which further helps the Government to reduce the benefit paid. In any event, the system operated means that applicants invariably complete the long, complex forms without advice and without any knowledge of the criteria applied to award

[*Ian C. Lucas*]

PIP. As a consequence, it is very often the case that the initial application results in previous recipients of DLA being awarded PIP, if at all, at a lower level.

When an application is made for mandatory reassessment, again the applicants have no detailed knowledge of the criteria, and the reasoning applied by assessors and communicated to the applicant is set out without specific reference to the points awarded for each individual disability. DLA was assessed by health professionals. The Government now contract private businesses such as Capita to carry out assessments. In Wrexham, the largest town in north Wales, there is no geographic base for personal assessments to be carried out and applicants are requested, as a matter of course, to travel more than 40 miles to Rhyl for an assessment. That is a disincentive to vulnerable people to proceed with the application.

On Monday evening, in the excellent “*Dispatches: The Great Benefit Row*”, presented by Ade Adepitan, we saw the shocking mindset of a number of the assessors. However, the views expressed in that programme reflect what I am told by my constituents. Individual applicants are subjected to rudeness from assessors when they question the obligation to travel distances. When one constituent of mine asked to have an assessment in Wrexham, rather than travel the considerable distance to Rhyl, the conversation went: “Do you receive DLA?” “Yes.” “Use the bloody money to get to Rhyl.”

When the mandatory assessment is completed, the appeal process is complex and difficult and, again, there is a paucity of advice available to applicants. There has been a huge increase in the number of individuals seeking advice in my office, and there are real capacity constraints in handling the quantity of them. Applicants are often vulnerable, stressed and upset by the whole process, and are intimidated by the complexity of the forms.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian C. Lucas**: I am sorry but I am going to continue. I will try to take interventions later.

Applicants are also intimidated by the manner of the assessors and the way in which assessments are set out when they are presented to applicants. Having considered a number of the assessments personally, I find it difficult to draft responses to the assessments effectively. The process is much more difficult than drafting court pleadings—I am a solicitor—and, without training and support, it is very difficult even for those experienced in drafting documents.

It is essential to have detailed knowledge of the points awarded for individual actions in order to respond properly to assessments made. The reality is that most applicants do not have that information themselves and do not have adequate access to expert advice to help them. I quote the experience of one of my constituents, Lindsay Usher, who sent an email to me earlier this week. She says:

“I am a carer for my husband John who had a major stroke, aged 55, in October 2010 that left him with various disabilities. He was awarded indefinite DLA...and recently had correspondence

to say that he had to now apply for PIP. I made the initial telephone call on his behalf and then the 40 page booklet appeared. We duly completed it and that in itself is stressful. John could not have done it on his own due to the complexity and ambiguity of the questions. They repeatedly try to trip you up and the stroke has left him with a degree of cognitive impairment. We returned it by the due date, 24 March. The receipt was acknowledged by the DWP by text message.

John then received a letter from Capita dated 28 March informing him that he would be assessed face to face by a ‘health professional’ at his home address on 11 April at 08.00 a.m. John takes about an hour and a half to get up, washed and dressed independently in the mornings (this information was written on the PIP claim form) but even though the timing of the appointment was not ideal we decided to accept it as the wording in the letter from Capita includes, in bold, ‘It is important that you go to this appointment. If you fail to go without a good reason, the decision-maker at the Department for Work and Pensions is likely to refuse your claim’. It’s quite intimidating. A further reminder letter dated 2 April was received from Capita confirming the appointment with the same ‘It is important that...’ sentence. Finally a text message was received from Capita on 6 April once again confirming the appointment...Roll forward to the appointment day...Alarms set for 06.00 a.m. Ready, waiting, stressed and nervous by 07.45 a.m. No sign of ‘health professional’. No email, no phone call, no text message. So I telephoned the Capita ‘Enquiry Centre’ at 08.56 a.m. The lady who answered had no idea why John had been ‘stood up’. I said we would give it a while longer. By 10.32 a.m. I phoned again. We got the obligatory ‘sorry’ but I told the young lady I spoke to that she could not be held responsible for the ‘health professional’s’ failure to appear.”

Another constituent became enmeshed in an argument over whether he was able to fully wash the top half of his body, as he has the use of only one arm due to a stroke; the assessor accepted that he could not wash the whole of the bottom half of his body. Parliamentary colleagues have approached me since this debate was listed to tell me of similar accounts affecting those they represent. This degrading assessment process makes sense only if it is understood that the policy’s central objective is to reduce the benefits of these disabled people. All these procedural steps work towards that end and make it more difficult for claimants to apply.

It made me sick to the stomach to see further personal independence payment cuts proposed in the Budget and to see the Minister defending them even before the Budget speech was made. At the same time, the Government cut capital gains tax and corporation tax. This rotten system endures and is often run by rotten people—we saw some of them on Monday night’s programme on Channel 4—who treat vulnerable people and their families with absolute contempt.

If the Minister wants to help disabled people—I respect him, and I am telling him what my constituents are telling me—will he now ask his Secretary of State to carry out a fundamental reappraisal of this appalling system? If he wants to salvage his reputation, that is the only way he will be able to do so. If he wants respect, he and his Department, and those who his Department employs and commissions, need to start treating vulnerable disabled people with the respect they deserve.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Everything my hon. Friend has said is applicable to the Delyn constituency in north-east Wales. It might help Members and the Minister to know that the value of the contract to Capita over 60 months in central England and Wales is £121 million. We can get better value and better, more compassionate performance out of that contract.

**Ian C. Lucas:** I agree entirely.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He is right that this is a massive issue. “Dispatches” highlighted the concerns that many people have about the PIP assessment. The same firm is contracted to carry out PIP assessments in Northern Ireland, where we have one of the highest DLA claimant rates in the whole United Kingdom because of the troubles. Like me, does he feel—perhaps the Minister will respond to this—that there is a great need for those who carry out the tests to have a higher level of competency?

**Ian C. Lucas:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. There is clearly a major problem, and MPs are seeing that in their constituencies across the United Kingdom. The purpose of securing such debates is to draw to the Minister’s attention to the mistakes made by Government. All Governments make mistakes—mistakes were made under a Labour Government—and there is a real mistake in this particular case that he needs to address.

**Dr Lisa Cameron:** Given the information that we have, this is an extremely valuable and timely debate. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on disability, I have particular concerns about the lack of involvement of individuals such as mental health professionals and general practitioners in gathering the information. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that should be standardised as part of the procedure?

**Ian C. Lucas:** Absolutely. These assessments, which often deal with vulnerable people who in many cases have particular complex medical needs, need to be carried out by individuals who know what they are talking about and who have not just been sent on an away day to establish whatever criteria Capita want to apply to let as few applications through as possible.

**Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. One of my West Lancashire constituents had their mobility car repossessed following a PIP assessment, but that was before a mandatory reconsideration or a tribunal to reconsider the case. Where is the natural justice? Does he agree that that is just one more area where the PIP process is ineffective? It is not always cost-effective, and it is certainly uncaring in its treatment of people. All of that has consequences for those being assessed, and it is time for the Government to reconsider their absolutely appalling approach to this problem.

**Ian C. Lucas:** I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The Motability issue is important and is causing concern on both sides of the House.

**Mr Andrew Smith** (Oxford East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his speech and on securing this debate. Are not the shortcomings that he rightly describes underlined by the success rate at first-tier tribunal appeals? The Barton advice centre in my constituency has an 82% record in overturning such wrong decisions.

**Ian C. Lucas:** That is absolutely the case, and it is important to realise the impact of determinations, such as the withdrawal of Motability cars, which are taken back within days pending an appeal.

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab): Everything my hon. Friend says is happening in Neath. What is the Department for Work and Pensions doing to ensure that the healthcare professionals who undertake the assessments are mental health specialists, as Capita claims? What exactly does “mental health specialist” mean? Are they qualified mental health nurses, doctors or carers? In one case in Neath, a report was done by a paramedic.

**Ian C. Lucas:** I am sure that the Minister will address those points in his response, which I will now allow him to make. I am grateful to him for being patient while I have taken interventions.

4.26 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas), who cares passionately about his constituents. I have enjoyed working with him on a wide range of issues relating to my role. I genuinely understand why he takes such a close interest in this subject, and I will do my very best to address the points raised both by him and in the interventions that he kindly allowed.

I want to make a few basic points absolutely clear at the beginning. This is not about reducing the number of claimants or the amount of money spent; it is a fact that the number of claimants and the amount spent will increase in every single year of this Parliament. PIP is a modern and dynamic benefit to help cover the extra costs faced by people with disabilities. By way of comparison with the old system, 16% of DLA claimants would expect to get the highest rate of benefits; it is 22.5% under PIP. An example of where there is a big difference is in hidden impairments, such as mental health conditions. Only 22% of those with a mental health condition would qualify for the highest rate of DLA, but under PIP it is 68% because the system is better designed to take such cases.

That situation comes about because, under DLA, claimants were predominantly assessed on the form they filled in—it was a long, complicated form. I accept that the PIP form is still not the simplest form, but it is better than the old DLA form. Some 70% of people who were given a benefit under DLA had no medical evidence, and the problem with that is that people will often under-diagnose, particularly if they have a hidden impairment. They might take for granted the challenges that they face and think that they are the norm and not something for which they should get support, whereas we recognise as a society that they should get that support.

The job of the assessors is, in effect, to help people fill in their form to a better standard than under the old DLA system. The Government determine how much is paid and how many points people need in order to qualify, so we are at the end of the system, but the assessors are there to assist claimants in making the very best case that they can make.

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I appreciate that people with mental health conditions or learning disabilities are likely to do better, but the 2010 Budget clearly set out, on page 40, table 2.1,

[Neil Coyle]

line 23, that DLA reform was solely designed to reduce spending on working-age DLA expenditure by £360 million by 2013-14 and by more than £1 billion by 2014-15. To claim that PIP is about being more generous to disabled people is just plain dodgy.

**Justin Tomlinson:** No, it is the reality that every year the number of people either on DLA or PIP—as Members can imagine, people are increasingly switching to PIP from DLA—is rising and the amount being spent is rising. That is what is happening. As things stand today, 1.32 million people have gone through the PIP process. About 745,000 claimants are now on PIP, and about 1.5 million claimants remain on DLA.

**Christina Rees:** Will the Minister explain why people who have been in receipt of DLA for more than 10 years are no longer eligible to receive disability benefit? Why are they no longer classified as disabled under the current Government guidelines?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I say gently that that is a little muddled, but I will come on to explain things. Under DLA, not only was the form complicated and people did not necessarily have the medical evidence, meaning that they could be under-diagnosed, but they were not reassessed. Many Members have implied today that we should not reassess people, but the reality is that every year the condition of one in three people will change so significantly that they should be on a different level of benefit. For the majority of those people, their condition is getting worse, not better.

Under DLA, we found that people were on a lower rate than they should have had for decades. Under the PIP process, there is a lot more evidence, which we use to say, “Right, this person has a fluctuating health condition, or a degenerative health condition, that will probably get worse, and they are currently only on the standard rate, but we have an expectation that they will probably progress to having a requirement for an enhanced benefit at a certain period of time.” We flag that up in the system, and that person would then automatically come in for reassessment.

People who are already on the highest rate and have a degenerative condition are not likely to have intense reassessments on a regular basis. It may very well be that many years pass before there is a telephone call to ask, “Are conditions still the same?” That is something that the old DLA system failed—

**Christina Rees** *indicated dissent.*

**Justin Tomlinson:** The hon. Lady can shake her head, but that is why only 16% of claimants on DLA received it at the highest rate, yet the figure for PIP is 22%.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): Does the Minister appreciate that my constituent Linda Isaac, who is currently receiving chemotherapy for bowel cancer, who has waited for 19 weeks only to be denied PIP and another nine weeks for a mandatory reconsideration, will not appreciate the modern “dynamic” PIP system that he is talking about?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I understand that point. It is difficult to comment on an individual case, and I am happy to look at such cases after the debate. The hon. Lady and I have worked together carefully on a number of cases, and I am happy to extend that invitation again.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The Minister is giving the impression that people on the old DLA are all being upgraded under PIP and retaining their payment. What we see in our constituency casework, however, is people coming off benefits altogether, and he is not addressing that point. Some of those people’s conditions are either getting worse or remaining the same.

I will make one final point, if I may. Will the Minister or his Department take action after the “Dispatches” programme on Channel 4?

**Justin Tomlinson:** In fairness, I am trying to respond to those points. I will make some progress, then I will cover the TV programme that was shown on Monday.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) *rose—*

**Justin Tomlinson:** I will be very generous and give way to my shadow, then I will make progress.

**Debbie Abrahams:** I am grateful to the Minister. He talked about the increase in the number of disabled people claiming PIP, but can he explain the impact assessment of the 2012—

**Steve McCabe (in the Chair):** Order. I am sorry to interrupt, but in a half-hour debate it is not customary for a Front Bencher to intervene.

**Debbie Abrahams:** Apologies.

**Justin Tomlinson:** I am sure there will be many other opportunities for the hon. Lady to ask me questions, and I look forward to them. Perhaps I have got a foresight of what her next question at Work and Pensions oral questions will be.

I acknowledge that when we first introduced the PIP process there were major problems with timings, but there has been a settled position for about a year now. It currently takes seven weeks for an assessment and 13 weeks—median end to end—to get a decision. The time taken has been reduced by about three quarters since June 2014.

I will now touch on the TV programme, which is obviously topical. I was as appalled as everybody else who watched that programme. To the credit of Capita, it has reacted quickly and the individual concerned—Mr Barham—has been dismissed, and rightly so. We have not been made aware of any evidence that this is a significant issue; it seems to be a disgracefully appalling but isolated one. We have been told, “The overwhelming feedback gathered so far is one of frustration, disappointment and anger about how this individual has let everyone down, undermining the hard work and effort that everyone puts in daily to deliver and continually improve the level of service provided both to the Department and the PIP claimant community.” Capita has assured me that it will conduct further checks to

make sure that this incident was an isolated one, and I was genuinely as appalled as everybody else who saw that programme.

**Ian C. Lucas** *rose*—

**Justin Tomlinson:** I will take one last intervention.

**Ian C. Lucas:** Before the programme was screened, individuals had been saying to me that the assessors' attitudes were wrong. I recounted one particular case, and I have been given other examples that I did not have time to cover today. Will the Minister please speak firmly to Capita and tell it to start treating people with respect?

**Justin Tomlinson:** Absolutely. That is happening; that is a given.

**Rosie Cooper** *rose*—

**Justin Tomlinson:** Let me make some progress, please, because I am on eight minutes and 40 seconds—

**Rosie Cooper:** Why not allow Capita to film those—

**Steve McCabe (in the Chair):** Order.

**Justin Tomlinson:** Let me make some progress and then, if I have time, I will take some more interventions.

The hon. Member for Wrexham made a fair point about the limited time for a claim. It is actually a month, but people can ask for longer. They automatically get two weeks without any questions, and further extensions are considered depending on the circumstances. For example, if somebody says, "I will need assistance in filling the form in", additional time will be given. If people struggle to fill in the initial forms on their own for a variety of reasons, the Department will send people to help them do so as quickly as possible.

As I highlighted earlier, the PIP forms are shorter and simpler than the old DLA forms. That does not mean that they are absolutely perfect yet. However, part of my role and my officials' role is that we regularly meet charities, other stakeholders and users of the service, who make suggestions. There are continuous improvements, and I would expect that to keep happening. The hon. Gentleman raised a fair point, and we have a taskforce on our wider communication, with representatives from all the major charities going through things with a fine-toothed comb. I am grateful for all their help and support in that regard.

At the very beginning of the process, if an individual has a condition that means that we have concerns about their ability to return forms, that is flagged up so that we do not just automatically let them drop off the system. We can then be proactive in trying to contact them and contract people who can provide support for them, to make sure, as I say, that they do not simply drop out of the system. That is a very important point.

We are constantly reviewing the quality of the system—that is really important—and one change we made recently was to add a further 10 days for the assessment providers to be able to gather and consider further evidence. That came about because of the 60%-odd success rate in the appeal process, which a number of

Members have mentioned. To put that into context, it involves about 2% of total claimants; as I have said, about 1.3 million people have gone through the system. When I first became the Minister and I saw the figure on successful appeals, the first thing I did was to visit the Cardiff office. I said, "Right. Presumably every time one of these is assessed on appeal, you down tools, sit down, analyse what we have done and make sure we never do that again." Actually, more often than not a decision is overturned because of additional evidence that has been provided—the key word is "additional"—either oral or written. So in theory the decision at the beginning was right, based on the evidence that was given, but we as a Department rightly provide people with two further opportunities to submit additional evidence for a reconsideration.

All Members will share our frustration in this sense—in an ideal world someone would phone up for a claim, give their national insurance number, we would have full access to all their medical records and they would not have to go and find the reports from their doctor or occupational therapist. Former Governments had a good go at achieving that, but for a variety of reasons it has not happened. We therefore ask people to submit new evidence.

A typical example of what can go wrong for a claimant is that they get their GP's evidence and put that in with their application, but they do not think to get the evidence from their occupational therapist. However, when we send them the letter that does not give them the benefit rate that they were hoping for, the information in it is clear enough for them to think, "Ah! If only I had done that." They then have those two further opportunities to submit evidence. So the majority of the 65% or so successful appeals are because of additional evidence being submitted, not because of mistakes in the system.

**Neil Coyle** *rose*—

**Justin Tomlinson:** I will take just one last intervention, because I have a bit more to say.

**Neil Coyle:** I am grateful to the Minister. His position seems to be that the process is right and that it is the fault of individuals for not submitting information at the right time. Would it not be in the Department's best interests to save money by ensuring that the decisions are right first time, by allowing individuals enough time to get their medical information in.

**Justin Tomlinson:** I think we agree—

**Neil Coyle:** But you control the process.

**Justin Tomlinson:** We have just added a further 10 days to the process, recognising that point. We want to get the right decision for the claimant first time. That is an absolute given, but we rely on individuals to present evidence. Everyone is unique. Everyone involved is facing a different challenge, which is why they are applying for the benefit. In an ideal world, we would have access to all their information and no one would have to provide it, but as I have explained, that information is not available. My colleagues in the Scottish Parliament are doing some interesting work in this area, and we will

[Justin Tomlinson]

look carefully at how that progresses, but we have added that extra time and are trying to be as clear as we can in the letters.

Beyond this debate, I will be interested to look more closely at the points that the hon. Member for Wrexham made about how the information that comes back to people is sometimes not clear enough. However, all claimants can request a copy of the full health professional's report at any stage in the decision-making process. That is automatically triggered at the independent appeal stage, but it is available before that if people wish to have it.

We are also working on the online application process, to put all the information in one place. A lot of people want to be able to apply online for convenience. An added benefit will be that we can put additional help and support online, but people will still be able to claim in the traditional way if they want to.

I do not have long, but I want to address the point that was made about locations. All claimants in north Wales are offered—

**Steve McCabe (in the Chair):** Order.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Sustainable Development Goals

**Steve McCabe (in the Chair):** For the convenience of Members, I point out that the debate can run until 5.41 pm.

4.42 pm

**Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I thank all Members for taking part in this debate. A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of attending the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations on behalf of the Women and Equalities Committee. It was the first time we had attended the United Nations, and it was a great chance to discover what more we can do as a Select Committee domestically and internationally to promote equality, specifically gender equality. During that week, it was clear that all nations have a responsibility to implement the sustainable development goals. Unfortunately, the UK is lagging behind, not least on goal 5, which is about the promotion of equality for women and girls. Given the evidence I saw at the CSW, we as a nation are falling short on our obligations to fulfil the sustainable development goal targets, and that needs to change.

There are three questions that the Government must answer so that we can ensure the goals are met. Who is in charge of the implementation of the goals in the UK? What is being developed? When is our approach going to be tested? I am sure everyone here knows what the sustainable development goals are, but for those who do not, the sustainable development goals were agreed by nations at the United Nations last year and provide the world with a new set of goals to meet by 2030. The goals aim to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all, and I am sure we are all in agreement that those are essential for the world and our peoples. Each of the 17 goals has its own set of targets, with 169 in total. If all those are met, that will ensure that the overall goal is reached by 2030.

What makes the sustainable development goals different from the millennium development goals is the commitment that no one will be left behind. If the goal is not reached for everyone, it simply is not reached. I hope that will encourage Governments, private companies and society as a whole to put establishing an equal society at the heart of everything they do. It will be vital to keep the aim of achieving the sustainable development goals constantly at the back of the mind when considering new policies, whether for individual companies or the country as a whole. The need for equality of opportunity underpins many of the goals and is important for no one to be left behind.

It is fantastic that we have this clear set of goals. It not only ensures that everyone in the world is working towards the same aim, but ensures that there are clear targets to allow us to measure our success. However, it would be a travesty if we were all standing here in 15 years' time contemplating what went wrong and why the targets were missed. We have the privilege of experiencing fantastic rights here in the UK, but we owe it to all those who do not share the same rights to ensure that we meet each of the 17 goals set out at the UN

last year. In fact, we owe it to the UK population to ensure that those rights are enshrined in British policy making. How can we as a nation turn to such countries as Kenya and preach about how they can enhance their rights when 58% of Kenya's Parliament are women and only 29% of MPs in our Parliament are female? That seriously impacts our credibility as a nation. To ensure that we are not in that situation, we need to start acting now.

The Overseas Development Institute has done vast amounts of research into the goals, looking into what progress the world will achieve towards reaching them if Government policy across the globe stays as it is today. Through its detailed assessment, the ODI found that if current trends continue, none of the goals or targets will be met. The goals are set in a way that forces big change to occur if we are to reach them—I believe that is what makes them such an asset—but the research makes it crystal clear that urgent work is necessary. We cannot let the goals pass us by, and we certainly cannot afford to reach 2025, just five years from the deadline, and realise that we are too far away to be successful.

**Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): The goals are not legally binding on nations. Does my hon. Friend agree therefore that civil society, the media and academia are all important in holding nations to account?

**Ben Howlett:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend that the goals are not legally binding, but they are internationally binding, and civil society and all parts of our society have a role to play in pushing them through. As a result of the sustainable development goals, I have seen many conversations in this place looking from an international perspective at how we can implement our sustainable development goals in this country. What we are missing is that crucial part, which I will come on to later, relating to who is responsible and when will the development goals be put into practice.

We need a well thought-out, holistic approach whereby we identify and tackle problems that still persist in our own country, while supporting other nations with their progress. It would be helpful to have a clear lead in the Government who can be held responsible for our progress, either in the Cabinet Office or the Department for International Development. Questions already need to be answered, such as why there has been such slow progress. We need to ensure that the Secretary of State for International Development is not sitting on the next high-level UN economic panel feeling awkward that Britain is without a clear implementation plan.

The Overseas Development Institute put together a scorecard showing how much effort is needed to achieve each goal. The scores did not make for good reading. Three of the goals were given a B rating, meaning that reforms are still needed to reach the target, but that we are none the less on the right track. Most of the targets received a C to E rating, meaning that reaching them needs a revolution in attitudes and policy, with radical approaches and innovation needed for us to have any chance of success. Five goals received an F rating, meaning that the world is moving in the wrong direction to achieve them. I hope the Minister will address what the UK is doing to improve those grades. At the end of the day, this is not something we can fail and resit.

The ODI research makes it clear that we have much to do over the next 15 years to reach any of the goals. As I have said, following my recent visit to the CSW, my personal focus, and that of the Women and Equalities Committee, is on seeing us reach goal 5, which is to:

“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”.

That is a big statement. It seeks equality. That is not just a bit of equality, or a step forwards or a 2% reduction in the gender pay gap or a few more girls taking science, technology, engineering and maths; it states “equality”, and we must remember that we signed up to that. As the UN document says:

“Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities.”

At this point, I would like to pause and pay tribute to the superb work being done by the UK's mission to the UN. Its ability and passion for the delivery of the sustainable development goals was totally apparent over that week at the UN. Much more must be done to ensure that that work is not done in vain. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, and Baroness Verma in the other place also took a superb lead at the commission, focusing on tackling goal 5.

Because of Britain's significant soft power, other nations are looking to us to make a stand and implement the sustainable development goals. Further delays will risk our credibility in the world's eyes. The Select Committee will be doing more internationally to hold our Government's feet to the fire and more to put equality legislation in an international context. We will be doing more work with other European and international equality committees and with other Parliaments to fight for the delivery of the goals by 2030. Of course, I look forward to reading the International Development Committee's report on the sustainable development goals in the coming months.

It is clear that the world has a lot to do to reach the goals, but it is still not clear what the world is going to do. It is crucial throughout the next 15 years that we remember that the goals are interrelated. We must understand that the policy to reach one goal may affect our attempts to reach others. I see equality and goal 5 as pivotal. The latter is central to ensuring that no one gets left behind.

We cannot be left behind in the implementation of the goals. Other nations are already being proactive about reaching them. Colombia set up an inter-agency commission on the preparation and effective implementation of the SDGs to oversee their implementation. Even before the goals were agreed, Sweden commissioned a delegation to support and stimulate the implementation of the SDGs, and it will develop a comprehensive action plan for their implementation. We must take similar action and create a cross-departmental strategy to reach each of the targets.

The SDGs certainly contain a bold commitment: to leave no one behind when it comes to change and progress towards an equal society. If we begin to create a plan today, we can ensure real progress around the world and in our own country.

4.52 pm

**Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): It is a great honour and privilege to speak under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) on securing such an important debate, and at the right time too.

Friends, in September last year, one could have seen a strange sight on a bright but crisp New York day. An unlikely crowd had been drawn together. I was stood with parliamentary colleagues from around the world at the announcement of the finalisation of the international negotiations. Alongside my colleagues were other, better-known faces: Beyoncé, Coldplay and Ed Sheeran. What could bring such unlikely allies together?

Building on the successes of the millennium development goals, the sustainable development goals have the potential to lift 800 million people out of extreme poverty. That is no mean feat, and on its own would be a success of broadly unmatched effect in global development. I have been campaigning on goal No. 3 in particular, which is to ensure

“healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”.

Too many children and older people around the world are left behind when progress is made. That is why I am so proud to have supported our commitment to spend 0.7% of GDP on international development. That commitment has provided long-term stability to the programmes we support. Department for International Development programmes have helped to save the lives of 44,000 women during childbirth and 97,000 newborn babies, and provided food security to 3.5 million people. That is the real effect of the money we spent and an indicator of what a comprehensive, integrated implementation of the sustainable development goals can achieve. Let us make success a reality, rather than just a goal.

The MDGs were plagued with questions; they did not offer a truly international solution to global problems and they created two classes of country. That is why such a diverse group joined together in New York last year. Where the MDGs were successful was in their fight to stop the global increase in the incidence of TB, malaria and HIV and AIDS. We now look to end those three epidemics by 2030. The new global goals are far more worldwide than the MDGs were. They apply not only in developing nations, but here in the UK as well. We are now committed to eradicating TB and HIV and AIDS at home, not just abroad.

In 2015, TB re-emerged as the world's leading infectious killer. It led to 1.5 million deaths in a single year. The Global Fund works across all countries ravaged by TB and is key to the fight to end the epidemic. It has saved about 17 million lives through its interventions so far, and perhaps 5 million more can be saved this year alone. More than 75% of all the financing in the global TB fight comes from the Global Fund. Sadly, however, at the current rate of investment, it looks as if we will only end TB in 150 years—not by 2030.

**Mrs Helen Grant:** On finance, does the hon. Gentleman agree that for all the goals to be achieved, which is what we want, we need to convert billions of pounds into trillions of pounds in aid? Does he agree that, in order to do that, much more work needs to be done to engage the private sector and make the most of the private capital market?

**Mr Sharma:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. She is a proactive member of the International Development Committee and we all agree that a partnership is needed, with Governments, the private sector, the third sector and all non-governmental organisations working in the field coming together to find a solution and the resources, which will be a huge amount.

The Global Fund needs replenishment. As part of our implementation of the SDGs, I want to see a commitment to keep the fund well supported. In the last round, we pledged £1 billion and, in line with most donor nations, we need to increase that by 20% to keep up with the aims of the goals to eliminate the diseases by 2030. The fund has the chance not only to eradicate infectious diseases, but to save a further 8 million lives by 2019.

The new SDGs offer a better way forward, and our Prime Minister threw his support behind them in New York. Implementation must be universal—universality is what makes the SDGs as promising as they are. The British Government should not merely choose a few goals and targets to focus on; all 17 goals and 169 targets should guide our strategy. However, this is not just an international development issue, because the SDGs work even more broadly than that. Along with, I am sure, others present in the Chamber today, I want to see the Cabinet Office given the role of co-ordinating the work across not only DFID, but the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. We are falling behind other countries, but we can do better, and co-ordinating action across Government to fulfil the promise of the Prime Minister's words in September is how we do that.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Steve McCabe (in the Chair):** May I check that everyone who wants to participate is standing? I will call the Front-Bench speakers at 5.20 p.m. and there are four of you, so if you take about five minutes each, we will get everyone in.

5 pm

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) on securing the debate on sustainable development goals, which are now referred to as development goals. Along with other Members here, I am a member of the Select Committee on International Development and I am also the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on sustainable development goals. I take a particular interest in this matter and the International Development Committee has an ongoing inquiry on it, so I welcome the chance to speak.

The SDGs are the successors to the millennium development goals. There were eight MDGs but there are 17 SDGs, which were agreed to at the end of last year. They are much broader than the MDGs and I was pleased to see that they gave particular focus to women and girls as well as to health, governance and much more. In fact, there is much more in the SDGs than in the millennium goals. They also require a fundamentally different approach to sustainable development from the UK and beyond. Like any plan, strategy or agenda, the

goals are all down to the delivery and implementation on the ground and the difference that will make to people's lives. That is how they will be judged, be that in the next few months and years or in 15 years' time.

In broader terms, the UK is taking a leading role in international development. I, too, am a supporter of the UK's commitment to 0.7% for international development, but it is not enough just to commit to spend; we must commit to deliver and achieve value for money and accountability for the British taxpayer. Good and effective international development is the right thing to do, and it is the smart thing to do as well. It is in the country's interests to do good international development, be that in responding to humanitarian emergencies and disasters, building resilience in countries that are prone to crisis, building stability or using influence. All of those are linked to goal 5 on women and equality, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) referred to today. The goals are very much interlinked. It was often said when they were agreed that perhaps there were too many, but I would not have liked the job of trying to remove one of them.

My hon. Friend spoke eloquently about women and equality, on which the Government have made a huge contribution. In particular, the girls' summit in 2014 showed the way and the importance of putting women and girls at the centre of international development, especially in education and in health. They have also done work on preventing sexual violence against women in conflict. Of course there is much more to do. I, too, would like to see greater clarity as to how the SDGs are linked into other Departments' plans as well as the broader official development assistance-defined projects.

I take the opportunity to highlight a couple of projects and campaigns that show the importance of SDG 5 and women and equality. First, as some Members know, I spent many of my summers in Rwanda with Project Umubano. I was there a number of years ago and I had the pleasure of visiting a project organised by ActionAid, helping to empower women—I often refer to it as the bee project. A group of women were shown how to farm beehives, which produced not just an income and livelihood for them but enabled them to educate their children, empower themselves and improve the future chances of their families, which is really important.

More recently, the Select Committee was in Nigeria, where one of the most humbling experiences was to meet some of the campaigners from the Bring Back Our Girls campaign. They hold a daily vigil at the Unity fountain in Abuja and we could not help but be moved by the stories they so bravely shared with us. These are just two examples.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I, too, would like to comment on the Bring Back Our Girls campaigners. We have been doing a lot of work with the Nigerian Government to try to help them to overcome Boko Haram and its horrendous maltreatment of young girls in northern Nigeria. The anniversary of that campaign is coming up; the girls have been missing for two years. I hope that the Minister will reflect on what more can be done.

**Wendy Morton:** I thank the hon. Lady for her valuable contribution. We were all moved that afternoon.

These are two very different stories. The bee project is a story of great hope, but Chibok is one of great sadness and tragedy. That is why SDG 5—achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls—is so important. I hope that in today's debate we are able to continue to raise the importance of DFID's work, the SDGs, women and diversity and, crucially, implementation and accountability. The success of the SDGs will depend upon the collection of data to analyse and assess the results, which is a challenge in itself. We need to be robust, because accountability matters. However, there must also be a recognition that although the UK is putting huge effort into the SDGs and playing a significant part, these are universal goals and it is up to everyone to play their part in them. Others must also step up to the mark.

5.6 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) on bringing this extremely important debate to Westminster Hall. The sustainable development goals are universal and therefore must be applied both at home in the UK and internationally. I do not wish to reiterate the information that has already been relayed so well by colleagues, so I will focus briefly on some issues that have been highlighted as part of my work on the International Development Committee, which is currently undertaking an inquiry into the sustainable development goals.

One very pertinent and important issue that I would like the Minister to comment on is the collection of data—from a variety of sources, both governmental and beyond. We must be able to evidence the implementation of the goals and indicators that we have set. There are a great many ways to collect informative and necessary data in the UK and in developing countries. In many countries where such data have never been collected, we must first gain a baseline to show where we are now, but we must also have data that give us an understanding of the progress that is being made towards full implementation.

**Mrs Helen Grant:** The hon. Lady is making a very good point. Does she agree that many developing countries will have difficulty collecting such data, and that this could be a great opportunity for DFID to do everything it possibly can to assist those countries to meet the required standard?

**Dr Cameron:** I agree entirely. It is key that we show leadership in this area, in which we historically have very good ability and understanding, and we can certainly lend our expertise to the rest of the world, including developing countries.

Data must be gathered from various sources. For example, if they exist at all, governmental data on child marriage are linked to the legality of child marriage. In countries where child marriage is illegal but still exists, such marriages are often not conducted in registered settings; they are cultural ceremonies and therefore unrecorded. People know that they are happening, but they are excluded from the data. We must therefore collect accurate data. Governmental data may not themselves be accurate. Household survey data are required,

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

as are data from technologies such as mobile phones, imaging and other sources, to make sure that the data are accurate, particularly for people—such as women—who may feel too vulnerable to provide accurate data to governmental agencies that are collecting such data. Will the Minister comment on the support that DFID is providing for data collection, and the use of technology in that collection, and the methods it uses to verify statistics, so that it does not just accept them at face value?

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): There is also the issue of the disaggregation of data. In terms of what the targets are—leaving no one behind—the data need to be articulate and specific, not least for groups that could easily be overlooked, such as ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. The way in which DFID deals with its own statistics is hugely important.

**Dr Cameron:** I thank the hon. Gentleman. He shows his expertise in the area. Disaggregated data will be crucial in our understanding of whether we meet indicators.

Before I finish I will speak of another particularly important part of the implementation—the “leave no one behind” agenda. As a member of the International Development Committee, I have been fortunate to visit a number of developing countries, and I must say that I have visited few projects that reach out and undertake interventions for people with disabilities. Many of those people continue to be left behind and marginalised, and are missing from the programmes that I have visited. Do we have data on their numbers? The data may vary across countries. What are we doing to ensure that people with disabilities are not continually left behind, and to ensure that we do not think we are doing enough because we are simply not reaching out and noticing that they are there? That should be integral to DFID’s programmes.

Summing up, because I am aware of the time and want the Minister to be able to respond, the SDGs are a welcome step forward. Their implementation is complex and requires funding, although I agree with other hon. Members that there should be investment, so that it is a partnership. Data collection and verification will be key, but what a worthwhile aim it is to make sure that we implement the sustainable development goals, and that the most vulnerable people across our world are no longer left behind.

**Steve McCabe (in the Chair):** I ask the last two speakers to divide the final eight minutes between them.

5.13 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): If there are eight minutes, I have four. It is a pleasure to be called to speak. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) on setting the scene, and other hon. Members who have made valuable contributions.

I am going to focus on the issues of health and the sustainable development goals, which the Minister will reply to. I know how much progress has been made in responding to epidemics. The dual impact of HIV and TB continues to be devastating for millions of people and their families. Of the 1.5 million people killed by

TB in 2014, 400,000 were HIV-positive. AIDS-related illnesses claimed some 1.2 million lives in 2014, which included 400,000 TB deaths among HIV-positive people. Malaria causes hundreds of thousands of deaths every year, predominantly among young children.

To put it in *Hansard* and on the record, the incidence of HIV and of TB in London has increased; I am not sure whether hon. Members are aware of that. They are probably coming from some of the people who have moved here and maybe their contact with others. We have issues here at home that we need to address, but that is not for this debate.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria plays an essential role in reducing these upsetting statistics, and will be part of the drive to eradicate them in future, but it needs help from Governments across the world. The Global Fund is asking Governments, the private sector and other organisations for a total just short of £10 billion for the period 2017 to 2019, which would save millions of lives and avert hundreds of millions of infections and new cases of HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. The debate we had in Westminster Hall yesterday on HIV in women and girls also highlighted that. The Minister responded, as he always does, in a very positive and helpful manner; I am sure he will do the same today.

Responding to the Global Fund’s call for additional resources, UNAIDS executive director Michel Sidibé said:

“We have to invest additional resources today to end these epidemics, otherwise the deadly trio will claim millions more lives, as well as costing us more in the long run.”

We need to be an integral part of the global efforts to eradicate the deadly trio, with the United Kingdom making a positive difference across the globe. Ensuring our commitment to the future success of the Global Fund will deliver that, as well as security and support for a global organisation that makes a positive difference.

When it comes to addressing the deadly trio, perhaps the Minister could give us some idea of what discussions have taken place between DFID and pharmaceutical companies to ensure that some of the very necessary medications and drugs get to where they need to be—at the source of the problems. Of course, that will not be free, but the Global Fund’s plan can work to end this pandemic. The Global Fund has been successful and is ready to continue its life-saving work if funded.

I attended an event today on the persecution of Christians in Nigeria. Tomorrow is the second anniversary of the kidnapping of 200 young girls in Nigeria, to which the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) referred. We have to speak out for women, for diversity and for equality, and on issues such as child marriage. There is a systematic abuse of women and girls, and that issue has to be raised and spoken about today.

Seventeen million lives have been saved globally because of the work of the global partnership; 8.1 million people living with HIV/AIDS who would not otherwise receive any treatment are receiving ARV therapy as a result of the Global Fund; 13.2 million people who would not otherwise have been tested for tuberculosis have been treated; and 548 million insecticide-treated nets have been distributed. We are trying to address the

issue of the number of people dying from malaria. We have a chance in this debate to highlight the issues, and I ask the Government and the Minister to do their best.

5.17 pm

**Mr Mark Williams** (Ceredigion) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) for initiating this debate and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for speaking with even faster delivery than normal, to ensure that I can say a few words.

I am speaking on the back of an event we held in Speaker's House yesterday with the all-party group on global education for all, which I co-chair, ParliREACH, Results UK and the Malala Fund, following an incredibly inspirational showing of the film "He Named Me Malala".

I want to talk in particular about education. First, I commend the far greater detail of the SDGs on educational issues—something on which civil society has been campaigning for years. We have heard about goals 3 and 5. I want to talk about goal 4 and the necessary depth that the SDGs have gone into. I will remind Members of goal 4.1:

"By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete"—

"complete" being the key word—

"free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes."

Goal 4.5 is:

"By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations"—

something that the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) mentioned. Finally, goal 4.c is to increase the supply of qualified teachers by 2030, which is essential.

We have built on the success of the MDGs, but we must now set a target to ensure that the term we used in those goals—out-of-school children—is made redundant in the next 15 years. Globally, 200 million young people still have not completed primary school education, with 60% of them being women. It is about ensuring quality primary and secondary education. The Malala Fund is adamant that we should ensure 12 years of education—not just primary, but meaningful secondary education as well.

Our all-party group has been to Kenya. We talked to many people there who asked us, "What happens then?"—"then" being when primary education finishes. We need to ensure that schooling is adequately resourced in terms of both physical and human resources. While the old MDGs had an emphasis on quantity, we had a healthy debate in New York, and we won talking about quality.

Malala was clear in her film about discrimination against young girls and women. Of course, we must ensure that we address the biggest minority of all: the disabled. In the few seconds I have left, I commend to hon. Members the all-party group's report entitled "Accessing inclusive education for children with disabilities in Kenya". I reiterate the point that many hon. Members made today: the Government's objectives need to be data-related. In other words, data need to be the starting point and we need to know how the Government's

intentions will be monitored. I look forward to the regular progress reports on how we are meeting the all-important SDGs.

**Steve McCabe (in the Chair)**: I ask the Front Benchers to follow the example of the Back Benchers and confine their remarks to about five or six minutes to give the Minister and Mr Howlett time to respond to the debate.

5.20 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) on securing this debate. This is first debate on various aspects of the SDGs since the goals were agreed but—I have used the shiny new *Hansard* search facility—about the fourth since the start of the Session. There was, not least, my own debate in Westminster Hall on 16 June last year. There was a debate on the educational aspects led by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) a few weeks later in July, and a very useful Back-Bench business debate on 10 September led by the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips). Just yesterday, the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) led a debate on tackling HIV and AIDS in women and girls, in which a number of the issues that we have heard about today were touched on. I suspect that we will continue to revisit these issues throughout this Parliament and the lifetime of the SDGs. That is appropriate, because the effective implementation of the sustainable development goals will require considerable and ongoing scrutiny and monitoring from Parliaments around the world.

I should declare an interest: until the election last year, I was an employee of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, the chair of the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland and a member of the Scottish Government's working group on the implementation of the sustainable development goals. I will perhaps touch on some of those things if time allows.

I want to look briefly at how the structure was arrived at and the opportunities that it presents, at the approaches that have been taken in Scotland—because there are lessons that DFID can learn—and, more generally, at the options for prioritisation and implementation of the goals by DFID. The process by which the goals were arrived at was incredibly inclusive and consultative. The SDGs are not simply the millennium development goals mark 2; they are a complete refresh. They represent a global consensus on the kind of world that we know is possible and that we have the resources, the knowledge and the technical ability to achieve. The most important thing that is needed is the political will to get there.

The universal, comprehensive nature of the goals is significant. The hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) talked about goal 3; the hon. Member for Bath and for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) talked about gender equality; and the hon. Member for Ceredigion talked about goal 4, on education. In the context of this debate, perhaps the most important goal is No. 17, on strengthening the means of implementation and revitalising the global partnership for sustainable development, because it will encourage all the Governments of the world to work

[Patrick Grady]

together to implement the goals in their own countries and internationally. As we have heard, no goal is met unless it is met everywhere and in full. That is the important universal nature of the goals.

The Scottish First Minister committed Scotland to the SDGs last July while they were still in draft format. She committed to the principle of achieving them at home and abroad and of using the Scottish Government's powers to meet them in Scotland to eradicate poverty and achieve gender equality, which is very close to her heart. A great deal of work is going on at civil society and civil service level to see how the goals can be integrated into the national performance framework and the Scottish national action plan for human rights. Incredibly encouraging progress is being made. It would be interesting to hear how DFID plans to take forward a similar approach and, more broadly, the attempt at policy coherence for development.

This issue also came up yesterday in the HIV debate. A number of us were disappointed at the Command Paper published by DFID. The Government had showed commendable leadership in the development of the goals, in the negotiation process. Then last November they published a Command Paper that mentions the global goals only four times in its 28 pages. It would therefore be useful to hear from the Minister when a clear strategy for implementation of the SDGs will be published and whether that will happen before the high-level political forum in New York in July—the first key milestone—what the cross-Government role will be and whether they see a role for the Cabinet Office in co-ordinating across Government how domestic policy has an effect overseas, but also how the goals can be met at home, as well as how this will complement other commitments that have been signed up to, not least the Paris commitments on climate change.

Hon. Members have raised a number of operational points, in particular about data collection and disaggregation of data. There are questions about the funding cycles that DFID introduces, given that these are 15-year horizons and many projects perhaps receive only two or three-year funding. I am conscious of the time, so I will conclude simply by reiterating what I said earlier. We have the knowledge, the ability and the technical know-how to reach these goals. What is needed is the political will.

5.26 pm

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett)—as a northern English MP, I have been looking forward for quite some time to addressing the hon. Member for Bath, because we know that there are no stray r's in the name of his constituency. I say well done to him for securing the debate and focusing on holding Governments to account, because that is the job of all of us, no matter which party we represent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) made an extraordinarily powerful speech, as he has done on a number of occasions, and reiterated the consensus across nearly all parties about the 0.7%, but it is interesting that, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) said, goal 17 refers to strong

institutions. That is also about collecting tax. In the week of the Panama tax release, we know that we need to be doing more, because we know that three times the global aid budget is held in developing countries, in offshore tax havens. We all have to work harder to ensure that we get more transparency, because we would not need international development aid budgets if companies at source paid their taxes in those developing countries.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) made a very powerful speech. I commend her work and her leadership as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on sustainable development goals. I sort of say that with a smile on my face, because I think she has her work cut out over the next few years, if she does not mind my saying so. We have made a start, but we have a long way to go.

Data are massively important, as the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) stated and as the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) said in an intervention. As a clinical psychologist, the hon. Lady will know that mental health is an absolute Cinderella service in developing nations. We try for parity in this country, but it is almost nowhere to be seen in developing countries. We will have to work much harder and do much better on that.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked, as he does every time, about the big three: HIV, AIDS and tuberculosis. I do not think there has been a debate to which he has not contributed. I commend him for his campaign work.

It was great to visit the jungle in Calais with the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) recently. Both of us, as former primary school teachers, felt the passion for education coming through.

The goals set out ambitions not just for the UK Government, but for all nations. The UK and DFID need to take a leading role in promoting the SDGs and implementation of the goals, as they did for the MDGs under Labour and the coalition. Realisation of these goals by 2030 is a significant challenge. That is why regular updates and scrutiny must accompany them—in order to hold all Governments to account.

What has come through in this debate is that the Government need to outline a clear strategy on how we implement the goals as soon as possible. It is important for the credibility and reputation of the UK as an international leader, especially in the light of the high-level political forum meeting in July, that we get that strategy out there. The point I want to press the Minister on is that I think the UK should be represented at that meeting at Secretary of State level. I hope that he can answer that point.

The implementation strategy should include a detailed review of what is required of the UK to achieve each goal. That could be achieved through a gap analysis. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow went on about data and the hon. Member for Foyle talked about data aggregation. We need to know the baseline and how we are moving forward. DFID and the leadership, through the Cabinet Office, need to show that.

Furthermore, the UK must commit to implementing the goals in their entirety, not picking them off one by one. Although it is recognised that political and economic

developments might necessitate a greater focus on certain goals at a given time, I urge the Government to ensure that the SDGs are continually maintained on the policy agenda as a whole—a commitment in line with the pledge to “leave no one behind”, as already mentioned. That and sustainability are the two key ideas that the public and civil society must be encouraged to engage with, as the hon. Members for Bath and for Aldridge-Brownhills pointed out.

I want to make a point about local government representation. My political party in Manchester will achieve 50% representation in May, if the results go our way. It is not just us, as national politicians, but civil society that is engaging.

The SDGs are an integrated and indivisible package of targets that should be delivered for all people, in all countries, with all institutions of civil society being engaged. We have an enormous opportunity before us to shape our planet as we take this journey to 2030. We must grasp that opportunity with both hands.

5.31 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne):** I will endeavour to speak quickly, but I am afraid that I will not be able to reach the word count achieved by the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Ceredigion (Mr Williams).

I commend the sense of urgency and haste brought to the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett). However, I want to introduce a sense of proportion. His accusation was “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin”—somehow we have already been weighed in the balance and found wanting. We have been scored already.

There are 17 goals, 169 targets and, the last time I looked, 250 indicators—the indicators have yet to be agreed by the General Assembly. It is rather too soon to start scoring anyone for doing anything. I accept that there is a challenge and that there has to be urgency, but equally we have to do such things properly and proportionately.

I commend to hon. Members the departmental goals set out by DFID on our website. They should look at those 10 goals, which have delivered a portfolio for DFID that is highly relevant to the 17 goals now adopted as the global SDGs. We are compliant with them in what we are attempting to do, which is no coincidence. The reality is that it is precisely because we had a leadership role in fighting for the goals that have been accepted that we are already doing much of what we need to do to achieve those goals.

We are working across Government and with our development partners to determine where our comparative advantage is and where we can make the greatest impact. There will, of course, be rather more formalised objectives once the whole review season is over.

First we had the spending review, which sets out the envelope in which we have to operate—the money that we will have in order to deliver the goals, which are central to everything that we do. Then we had the strategic defence and security review, into which our own aid strategy fits intimately, in our national interest—I have no difficulty facing any audience to defend the fact that the achievement of the goals is intimately connected with our national interest. Now, we are still going

through the bilateral aid review and the multilateral aid review, which determine how we can achieve the best value for money in how we operate in the countries we operate in, and through the organisations and partners that we operate through, in order to achieve the goals most effectively. I know that it is frustrating and takes time, but my hon. Friend the Member for Bath will know that time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted. These are important decisions and it is important that we get them right.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) raised the vital point about data, which is worth a debate in its own right. The reality is that we spotted this coming. There has to be a data revolution. She is absolutely right. The earliest meetings and conferences on that were organised by Lynne Featherstone when she was the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in this Department, and we continue to lead on it.

We set out in the Conservative manifesto that preceded the election a series of 23 initiatives that are highly relevant to the achievement of the goals. I do not anticipate, given all the work that we are currently doing, that there will be a separate goal strategy document. The goals are intimate to everything we are doing at the moment through the bilateral aid review and the multilateral aid review, which will be published.

On the question of no one being left behind, we saw this coming ages ago. We had published our framework for disabled people, and we were already driving forward an agenda on women and girls and ensuring that our development partners were delivering on that. Before even the General Assembly adopted that principle, we had spotted that it was an important tool for resource allocation within our Department, and had produced two papers to instruct staff on how to use it. It is central to what we do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bath was absolutely right that we have to implement the goals universally, which means doing so here. If we do not do it successfully here, we will have no credibility as an international development force to see that they are developed elsewhere. That is an essential point, and my hon. Friend asked a number of important questions about it. My prejudice is that we are pretty well compliant, but it is not my prejudice that will count.

This is a matter for departmental responsibilities. Departments must take ownership of the goals that fall within their terms of reference. However, cross-Government responsibility will be taken by the Secretary of State for International Development—that is appropriate because we are the Department that fought for the goals and we are passionate about them—and she will be supported in that role by the Cabinet Office.

It is early days. There have been a number of conversations across Government, and I suspect that we will know more shortly when the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin), appears before the International Development Committee. That evidence will be instructive.

Responsibility for measurement will be with the Office for National Statistics. It has already contributed hugely and taken a leadership role in the determination of the 250-odd indicators that have yet to be agreed. We anticipate that they will be agreed shortly. We currently

[*Mr Desmond Swayne*]

measure social progress across the United Kingdom against 60-odd indicators, so there will need to be a measure of mapping.

On the “no one left behind” agenda, which is central to everything we do and will determine whether the goals have been met, we in DFID are setting up a cross-Government committee, together with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Office for National Statistics, to drive that forward and ensure that the lessons we have been learning internationally are applied nationally.

I need to give my hon. Friend the Member for Bath a moment or two to sum up, but I hope that in my very short speech I have been able to convey both a recognition of the urgency and the fact that there is indeed a plan.

5.40 pm

**Ben Howlett:** I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for his response, and I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in this crucial debate. Whenever I follow

a speech by the Minister, I always need to go back and learn a little more Latin, which I will do with the utmost urgency.

**Mr Swayne:** It was Hebrew.

**Ben Howlett:** It was Hebrew; I apologise—even more so since I am visiting Israel later this year.

There is clearly some sort of confusion here. I look forward to seeing the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin), give evidence to the International Development Committee. It is sensible that the Secretary of State for International Development is leading the way.

5.41 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).*





# Written Statements

Wednesday 13 April 2016

## TREASURY

### Financial Services

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin):** In November 2013, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) announced that it would investigate the serious allegations made against RBS's global restructuring group, regarding the treatment of small and medium-sized business customers.

In a letter from Tracey McDermott—acting chief executive of the FCA—dated 12 April 2016, the FCA states that it has now received the draft final report from Promontory Financial Group, who were appointed by the FCA to undertake the review.

There are a number of important steps to be taken by the FCA before the report is finalised, and the FCA remains committed to completing the review as soon as possible.

I have placed a copy of the FCA's letter in the House of Commons Library.

[HCWS670]

### National Infrastructure Commission Reports

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands):** Today I announce the publication of the Government's response to three reports by the National Infrastructure Commission on pressing infrastructure challenges facing the country.

“Smart Power”, published on 4 March, sets out a plan to ensure that supply and demand are balanced as efficiently as possible in the energy system, and the Government welcome the report as an opportunity to transform the future of the UK's electricity sector:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/smart-power-government-response-to-the-national-infrastructure-commissions-report>

“Transport for a World City”, published on 10 March, sets out priorities for future large-scale investment in London's public transport infrastructure, and the Government welcome the report as an opportunity to support London's continued growth through strategic, long-term investment in infrastructure:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-for-a-world-city-government-response-to-the-national-infrastructure-commissions-report>

“High Speed North”, published on 15 March, is a plan to transform the connectivity of the northern cities, and the Government welcome the report as an opportunity to help drive forward the Northern Powerhouse:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-speed-north-government-response-to-the-national-infrastructure-commissions-report>

The National Infrastructure Commission was announced in October 2015, to provide expert independent analysis of the long-term infrastructure needs of the country. The commission has been operating in shadow form since then.

At Budget 2016, the Chancellor confirmed that the Government have accepted the commission's recommendations in its recently published reports. Copies of the documents will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Government have recently consulted on the structure, governance and operation of the commission, and propose to introduce legislation to put the commission on a statutory footing.

[HCWS671]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Westminster Foundation for Democracy

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond):** I am pleased to announce the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is continuing support for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). I am also pleased to inform the House that the Secretary of State for International Development has agreed that the Department for International Development (DFID) will also continue to support WFD.

The FCO will provide £3.5 million to WFD in 2016-17 and plans to provide a similar level of funding in 2017-18. DFID will provide up to £6.5 million to WFD over the next two financial years. Continuation of funding will be subject to WFD's performance.

WFD is uniquely placed to deploy UK parliamentary and party political expertise to help developing democracies. This funding will ensure WFD is able to continue to implement high-quality programmes to strengthen Parliaments and political party structures.

[HCWS668]

### Ministerial Correction

**The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington):** During the estimates day debate on 1 March I said that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) had contributed \$215,000 to a memorial to the battle of New Orleans, *Official Report*, column 868. However, this must be corrected, since the FCO has not yet made the donation to the memorial. The FCO has been allocated \$215,000 from HM Treasury to support the project, but will disburse the funds only once the project is more advanced and sufficient funds to cover the full cost of the memorial have been secured, beyond those of the existing donors. In addition, I said that the State of Louisiana had made a donation, but it has not done so.

[HCWS669]



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