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19 May 2016**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 19 May 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Business of the House

9.34 am

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): Mr Speaker, you will notice a degree of commonality in the business for next week:

MONDAY 23 MAY—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech on defending public services.

TUESDAY 24 MAY—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech on Europe, human rights and keeping people safe at home and abroad.

WEDNESDAY 25 MAY—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech on education, skills and training.

THURSDAY 26 MAY—Conclusion of the debate on the Queen's Speech on economy and work.

FRIDAY 27 MAY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 6 June will include:

MONDAY 6 JUNE—Remaining stages of a Bill. It will be one of the two main carry-over Bills, and we will confirm which one early next week.

I should also inform the House that the statement on Syria, which we unfortunately had to move at the last moment, just before Prorogation, will take place alongside the foreign affairs debate next Tuesday.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 6 June will be:

MONDAY 6 JUNE—Debate on an e-petition relating to restricting the use of fireworks.

Chris Bryant: Mr Speaker, if only the rules allowed me to take some interventions.

I am sure the thoughts of the whole House will be with the families and friends of those on EgyptAir flight 804, which has disappeared over the Mediterranean. People will want to know what has happened, so I hope that the Leader of the House will be able to tell us and to ensure that the House is updated on any developments, not least because, as I understand it, there is at least one Briton on the flight.

I am delighted that the Leader of the House made a sort of apology for not giving us the statement on Syria which he went out of his way to promise the last time we were here. I note that he says that it will be alongside the foreign affairs debate, but will it be separate?

Chris Grayling *indicated assent.*

Chris Bryant: The Leader of the House has nodded, so we can move on.

Can we also have a statement—another statement—from the Foreign Secretary explaining why he wanted to have General Sir Richard Shirreff court-martialled? Leaving aside the Foreign Secretary's incompetence for not realising that Shirreff reported to NATO and not to him, surely the general should have been congratulated, not threatened, for stating that slashing troop numbers was a "hell of a gamble".

I love a bit of dressing up just as much as any other defrocked vicar—almost as much as you, in fact, Mr Speaker—but I did think that yesterday was a case of all fur coat and knickerbockers. There were so many ironies. Her Majesty announced that the Government will legislate for driverless cars and space ports—and arrived in a horse-drawn carriage. She announced that the Government intend to tackle poverty—to a room full of barons and countesses dressed in ermine and tiaras. Even the door handles on the royal coach were decorated with 24 diamonds and 130 sapphires.

The Government also announced that they will put the National Citizen Service, which operates just six weeks a year, on a statutory footing, while the nation's youth service, which works all year round, has been slashed, losing more than 2,000 youth workers, closing 350 youth centres and cutting 41,000 youth service places between 2012 and 2014 alone. Why not put the youth service on a statutory footing too?

That really is what is so truly awful about yesterday's Queen's Speech. It was pretending to be a one nation speech; it was all dressed up as such. It was a candy-floss speech if ever there was one—all air and sugar, whipped up with just a hint of pink in an attempt to make us all believe that compassionate conservatism is still alive. But the truth is that the Chancellor puts a stake through the heart of compassionate conservatism every time he stands at the Dispatch Box.

Yes, let us reform the Prison Service, but we should not dare to pretend that the horrendous state of our prisons—with the rate of suicide, murder and other non-natural deaths at a record high; with daily acts of violence; and with drugs freely available throughout our prisons—has nothing to do with this Government's assault on the Prison Service budget and the loss of 7,000 prison officers since 2010, largely on the right hon. Gentleman's watch. Yes, let us improve adoption, but we should not pretend that social services budgets in the poorest local authorities in the land are not now so stretched that children are being put at further risk every single day of the week.

The Government can say until they are blue in the face that they want to tackle some of the deepest social problems in society, but when they have pared public services to the bone, inflicted the toughest cuts on the poorest communities and systematically undermined the very concept of public service, all their blandishments are nothing but a sugar coating for a cyanide pill.

I do not know what time you got up yesterday morning, Mr Speaker, so I am not sure whether you were up early enough to catch the Leader of the House on the "Today" programme, when he tried to defend the former Mayor of London. I particularly loved the assertion, repeated four times, that Boris is a historian and he was making a historian's comment, as though that somehow

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meant that he could get away with saying anything he wanted. Where on earth do I start? The former Mayor has a habit of making up so-called historical facts. My favourite was his assertion that King Edward II enjoyed a reign of dissolution with his catamite, Piers Gaveston, at Edward's recently discovered 14th century palace. I do not doubt that Gaveston liked a bit of royal rumpy-pumpy, but since he was beheaded fully 12 years before the palace was built, it is pretty unlikely that he did so there. My only explanation for that so-called fact from the former Mayor of London is that he was a member of the Piers Gaveston society at Oxford with the Prime Minister, where they got used to porkies.

Mr Speaker: Order. The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that if the Leader of the House was doing his business on the "Today" programme between 6 and 7 am, I was almost certainly in the swimming pool at the time. Talking of beheading, the hon. Gentleman is in some danger of beheading himself, because he has already had five minutes. I think he is in his last sentence.

Chris Bryant: I am certainly in my last paragraph, Mr Speaker.

Finally, I gather that the Leader of the House is off to the United States of America next week. He is such a close friend and ally of Mr Trump that I am sure Trump tower is preparing the ticker-tape reception for him now. They have a habit in the United States of America of playing appropriate music when important politicians and international statesmen, such as the Leader of the House, appear on stage. The President always gets "Hail to the Chief". I have had a word with the American ambassador, and I gather that they have got Yakety Sax from "The Benny Hill Show" ready for the Leader of the House.

Chris Grayling: First of all, on a very serious point, all our good wishes and sympathies go to the families of the passengers on the EgyptAir plane, who must be beside themselves with worry about what has happened. It is a deeply worrying situation. Clearly, if it turns out to be something more than an accident, we will want to discuss the matter in the House, but it is important that we await the outcome of the initial investigations and the search for the plane. All our hearts go out to everyone involved.

On the Syria statement, I reiterate that it will be a separate statement, but we have put it alongside the foreign affairs debate to ensure that those who are most concerned about the issue are likely to be present.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is such an old misery. Yesterday was Britain at its finest: strong institutions, great tradition—things that make this great city one of the finest, if not the finest, in the world—a monarch we should be proud of and a programme for government that fulfils the commitments we made to the electorate at last year's election which, I remind Labour Members, they lost and we won. We set out 21 new Government Bills. The programme for government completes most of the manifesto on which we won the election. It helps us to achieve our financial targets to balance our nation's books and complete the sorting out of the mess that we inherited from Labour.

It includes measures on children in care and on prisons. It helps to boost our digital economy. It helps to strengthen our ability to combat terrorism.

The hon. Gentleman talks about compassionate conservatism. Let me remind him of three things. First, in the past 12 months we have introduced the national living wage. Secondly, in the past 12 months claimant count unemployment has been at its lowest level since the 1970s. Thirdly, there has been a fall of more than 750,000 in the number of workless households—a change that will make a transformational difference to many of our most deprived communities. Those achievements were made under a Conservative Government, sorting out the mess that we inherited.

The hon. Gentleman started by talking about taking interventions, and here I have some sympathy with him. He did better this morning than the leader of the Labour party did yesterday. I noticed that the shadow Leader of the House yesterday spent 41 minutes trying to look at the shoes of Conservative Members rather than looking at the leader of his party making such an awful speech.

I am not sure whether the shadow Leader of the House raised any other questions. I was grappling with trying to understand what on earth he was going on about in the middle of his contribution. Let me be clear that we are at the start of a Session in which we will deliver before the House measures that will make a transformational difference to this country; measures that will make a difference to our most deprived communities; and measures that will make this country more secure economically and more secure against the national threats that we face.

In the week that the YMCA has named its latest building the Chris Bryant centre—after the famous Chris Bryant, not this one—we should pause for a moment to praise the shadow Leader of the House. He is a great champion of equalities in this place, and he and I share the ambition of wanting more women to be elected to office. I am delighted to see that his constituency has done its bit by electing a woman to represent it in Cardiff, and who knows whether we will see a further step in that direction in this House in 2020. While we are on the subject of the shadow Leader of the House, may I congratulate him on stepping in to save the local calendar competition in Rhondda following the defeat of its founder, Leighton Andrews, in the Welsh elections? Who knows, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman will have his very own calendar girl for the month of May 2020 in the Rhondda—Leanne Wood.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): The controversial HS2 project has again been in the media, with talk of further cost overruns and potential cuts to the scope of the project. The announcement of the finalised route for phase 2 will not be made until at least this September—a year late—exacerbating the blight on my constituents. May we have a statement to update the House on the progress of HS2 so that we can know exactly how big the white elephant has grown?

Chris Grayling: I do understand my hon. Friend's concerns. His constituency is one of those that faces challenges from HS2, but also in my view benefits from it in the way it will open up parts of our economy, improve infrastructure and make a difference to jobs and business prospects. I understand the concerns he

has raised. We have a debate on transport today, but I will make sure that the Secretary of State for Transport is aware of the concerns that my hon. Friend has raised.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. We, too, pass on our best wishes to all those caught up in the Egyptian airline event. Let us hope that there can be some sort of positive resolution to it all.

What a few weeks we are going to have. We will have to spend most of our time discussing the anaemic, tortured stuff in the Queen's Speech, when all Government Members want to do is knock lumps out of each other over the EU referendum. The debate in the Tory party is hardly reaching Churchillian standards of discourse. According to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) on the radio this morning, it is apparently all about insults, personal attacks and tabloid smears.

My hon. Friends are already considering our amendments to the driverless cars Bill. Most of them involve locking this Tory Government into the said vehicle and heading it towards the nearest cliff edge. The Scotland bit in the Queen's Speech yesterday got 22 words, which is actually quite good given what we usually get when we are included in all this. It may be a one nation Queen's Speech, but one of those nations certainly is not Scotland.

We still have not secured from this Government a statement on all the now quite explosive evidence in the Conservative party submission to the Electoral Commission about the conflict between national and local spending during the last election campaign. Fourteen police forces are now investigating this alleged electoral fraud, yet we have not heard one peep from the Government. They know what they were up to, because a book has been serialised in *The Daily Telegraph* called, "Why the Tories Won: The Inside Story of the 2015 Election", which says:

"The buses were critical to moving party troops from where they lived to where the swing voters could be found. The central party paid for all the buses and trains, as well as hotels and hostels."

We must now have an urgent statement from the Government on what they will actually do about this.

Lastly, may we have a debate on world war two? It would allow senior Labour and Conservative Members to indulge their new passion of talking about Hitler. We could hear about all the dodgy histories and spurious examples, and it might take minds off the raging civil wars within the Labour party and within the Conservative party, which we are immensely enjoying.

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments about the EgyptAir plane. We are all waiting with hope, but also with trepidation, to hear what has happened.

I am really not sure that this is the week for Scottish National party Members to talk about stories in the tabloids. I have read the news, and I have to say that there must be something in the water in Scotland. As you will remember, Mr Speaker, I told the House a few months ago that the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) had written to me about recess dates because he wanted to put the ram in with the ewes. At that time, I thought he was talking about sheep.

The Queen's Speech was a powerful package for this country. It will deliver change for Scotland and the whole of the United Kingdom. It included important measures for our economy and our security. The SNP cannot have it both ways. It cannot, on the one hand, demand and secure far greater powers for the Government in Edinburgh and the nation of Scotland, and then turn around and complain that it has not got a huge range of measures in the Queen's Speech. We will look at how the SNP uses those powers. Yesterday, its leader in Westminster said yet again that the SNP wanted more powers for Scotland. Perhaps it might like to use the powers it has in the first place.

On the subject of the Scottish Parliament and Administration, I congratulate the First Minister on her re-election. I also congratulate Ruth Davidson, our Scottish leader, on depriving the Scottish National party of its majority in the Scottish Parliament. We will be an effective Unionist opposition to the SNP, and we will hold it to account to use the powers it has been given wisely in the interests of Scotland. If it does not do so, we will then defeat it.

The hon. Gentleman raised election issues. Those are matters for the appropriate authorities: they are not matters for the Government.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on the BBC and its relationship with the European Union, especially in relation to its coverage of the EU? It was revealed in *Heat Street* magazine this week that the BBC received £2.1 million from the European Union between April 2013 and September 2015. That is on top of at least £141 million in soft loans from the European Investment Bank. On the bank's website, it says:

"The EIB is the European Union's bank. We work closely with other EU institutions to implement EU policy."

That is the only basis on which to get one of those loans. Surely those matters should be declared by the BBC whenever it covers the EU referendum. May we have a debate on that and perhaps the Leader of the House could tell us whether he agrees that the BBC should have to declare that interest during its EU referendum coverage?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes his point with his customary effectiveness. I have no doubt that the BBC will be listening carefully to his comments and, if nothing else, the view he has put forward will ensure that it goes even further out of its way to try to make sure that it is impartial in the referendum campaign.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Can the Leader of the House explain the difference—perhaps we could have a statement—between the 1975 referendum, during which Ministers disagreed without bitterness, important arguments were made and personal attacks were not made, and the present campaign, in which Cabinet and other members of the Government and their supporters have such bitterness, strife and rancour between them over the question of remain or leave? It is not very civilised and totally unlike 1975.

Chris Grayling: Ironically, I wrote a short piece for *City A.M.* this morning about social reform, alongside my deputy from a different side of the argument. I

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assure the hon. Gentleman that we are still best friends, unlike most people in the Labour party, who appear to be preparing to knife their leader in the back.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): May we have a debate on the important report on antimicrobial resistance that came out this morning? It was initiated by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, and it is vital. I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) and for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) have spoken eloquently on the subject, but we need an opportunity to discuss the terrifying prospect of increasing antimicrobial resistance as soon as possible.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes a very important point indeed. We spar on political matters, but this issue affects all of us and should be of great concern to our country and to the world as whole. It is a serious issue. Of course, we will have a debate on Monday on public services and that might be an opportunity for my hon. Friend to discuss the matter in the House with the Secretary of State. If not, it is an issue that we should certainly look to return to.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): In the past month, there have been 11 serious stabbings involving young people in my borough. There have been 114 incidents of serious youth violence in Lambeth and more than 2,300 across London. This is a crisis situation and it is nationwide. It has been occurring for several months now, yet it did not merit a single mention by the Prime Minister in his remarks in this House yesterday on the forthcoming agenda of this Government. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement on whether the Government will agree to what I and many Members of this House, on both sides, have been calling for—a proper, independent, cross-party commission on this issue—because right now, to many of my constituents, it does not look like this Government care about what is happening on our streets?

Chris Grayling: First, I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the seriousness of the issue. I disagree with him that we have not taken it seriously. We have sought both to tighten the law—I did some of that when I was Justice Secretary—and to engage young people. Yesterday's Queen's Speech included our plans to extend and solidify the National Citizen Service, which we believe will help to engage young people who might otherwise find themselves in the wrong place in our society. I pay tribute to the work done by the voluntary sector; some fantastic projects in London seek to engage young people and take them away from this. We will come back to this issue, and I will make sure the Home Secretary is aware of the request the hon. Gentleman has made. I can assure him that we take it very seriously indeed.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): As you know, Mr Speaker, I am the chairman of the all-party group on south west rail. Earlier this month, the Peninsula Rail Task Force published its initial proposals, which are open for public consultation until 27 May. After that, may we have a debate so that

south-west Members of Parliament can make sure that the Department for Transport understands exactly what we want in the south-west?

Chris Grayling: Obviously, I am well aware of the challenge we face with rail in the south-west. We had the difficult experience a couple of years ago of the line being washed away and having an extended period when it was closed. I know that the Department for Transport takes this enormously seriously, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he is doing to make sure it is kept firmly on the desks of Ministers. I remind him that after this morning's statement there will be an opportunity for him to raise the issue in the debate on transport, and I advise him to do just that.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Last Thursday, after Parliament had been prorogued, the Government published the peer review reports on the deaths of 49 social security claimants who had died between 2012 and 2014—this was after Ministers had denied that they had any records on people whose deaths had been linked to the social security system. Given the gravity of this matter and given that this is the second time data have been released on the deaths of social security claimants while Parliament has been in recess, when will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to this House on what action has been taken to address the recommendations in these reports?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady will have the opportunity to raise this issue next Thursday, when there will be a debate on work and welfare matters in this House. I am sure she will take the opportunity to do that.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I was pleased to see a higher education Bill announced in yesterday's Gracious Speech. It will enable more universities to be built, increase the participation of those from deprived families, and increase diversity reporting. Can my right hon. Friend update the House as to when the technical consultation on the teaching excellence framework will be announced, particularly for the universities sector? What will be the timescales for the debate, aside from on Wednesday of next week?

Chris Grayling: I do not know the dates of the technical consultation, but I can tell my hon. Friend that the higher education Bill will be brought before this House very shortly. It will be one of the earliest Bills to be debated in this Session, and I have no doubt that he will want to make his points in that discussion.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): May we have a statement from the Home Secretary next week on the plight of the Brain family from Dingwall, who are ably represented in this House by my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) and who are threatened with deportation? This young family came to Scotland five years ago under the fresh talent initiative. They have contributed massively, of their money and their efforts, to the community. They are self-supporting and contribute to community efforts—I include in that their young, seven-year-old son Lachlan, who has known no other home but Dingwall and whose first language is Scots Gaelic. Does the Leader of the House feel no shame at all that his party's narrow obsession with

immigration statistics could result in a huge injustice being perpetrated against this young family and a huge disservice being committed against the people of Scotland?

Chris Grayling: First, I do not know the circumstance of the case, but I will draw the right hon. Gentleman's comments to the attention of the Home Secretary this morning, after the end of this session. However, it is important to remember that, if people come here for a temporary period, it does not automatically mean that they will have the right to stay here at the end of that period. That is important to remember when we are dealing with these cases.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I wish urgently to raise the case of Gloria Calib, a 38-year-old student from Lahore, who proposes to leave her family to do her viva and complete her PhD at the London School of Theology. Her visa has been turned down despite the backing of a former bishop in this country. Will the Leader of the House make time for a statement on visa processes for genuine academic candidates, so that these issues can be resolved? There seems to be a pattern of middle east Christians being put into bad circumstances and not evaluated very well.

Chris Grayling: Again, I cannot comment on the individual case because I do not know the circumstance. What I can say is that we do not have Home Office questions for a little while yet, because we had them relatively recently, so the best thing for me to do is to draw the attention of the Home Secretary to the case that my hon. Friend has raised and ask the Home Office to deal with him directly on it.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): The Leader of the House has said that the Government's intention is to make the UK more economically secure. In the light of that, can we have a debate in this House on farm-gate prices, particularly in relation to the regional differentials between farm-gate prices in Northern Ireland and those in Britain, because farmers in Northern Ireland are being placed at a severe financial disadvantage?

Chris Grayling: Again, I do not know enough about the detail of the case. Perhaps the hon. Lady could write to me, and I will ensure that she gets a proper response, but I do not have detailed knowledge of the farm-gate price situation in Northern Ireland.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): On the frontline of the security of this nation are our armed police officers, who are often put in very dangerous circumstances and have to make a decision in a split second. If they are forced to make that decision, they then face months of scrutiny over whether that decision, taken in a split second, was right or wrong. Can we have a debate on the process of analysing those decisions and the scrutiny under which those officers are put?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are in the process of recruiting more than 1,000 new armed officers as an essential part of the strategy that we now have to combat the risk of terrorism in this country. If an incident does take place involving an armed officer, it is important to ensure that, for the protection of that officer as much as anything else, it is properly checked and investigated. We must not get

ourselves into a position where people do not want to be armed officers and are not willing to act because they are concerned about the consequences for themselves.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): The Department of Health is due to publish soon the NHS health action plan on hearing loss. Does the Leader of the House know whether there is a date for when that might happen, and whether it will be in the form of a written or an oral statement? A number of us will be bidding for Adjournment debate time to discuss the matter. It is a good news story for the 3 million hard of hearing and deaf people in the UK. A lot of great work is being done in the Department and by the NHS, and it would be really good to see the Government leading from the front on this.

Chris Grayling: I know that the Government are working on that. I do not have an exact date yet, but I am sure that they will want to update the House fully. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking that there will be an oral statement, but I suspect that, when it happens, there will be a desire by the Department of Health to inform the House as widely as possible. I am sure that it is the kind of issue that may well end up being debated either in an Adjournment debate or in a Backbench Business Committee debate once the new Chair is elected. Let me pass on my commiserations to the former—and potentially future—Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), for the events of the past couple of weeks. Who knows, he might bounce back quickly.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The humanitarian crisis in north-east Syria is becoming worse, with international aid unable to reach the region. Food prices have increased severalfold. A kilo of tomatoes is 800 Syrian pounds and a kilo of sugar is 1,000 Syrian pounds. The average wage is a 10th of what is needed to buy food for a family of five people. Although ISIS, or Daesh, is on the back foot, it still controls the only road access to the region. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate or a statement on this vital issue?

Mr Speaker: Order. Before the Leader of the House responds, may I say to the former Chair of the Backbench Business Committee that I was cheering for Newcastle on Sunday, and how magnificent it was to see them beat Tottenham 5-1, therefore ensuring that Arsenal finished above Tottenham on the last day of the season.

Chris Grayling: Mr Speaker, I think you have just made yourself enormously popular with a large part of north London and enormously unpopular with another part of north London, but I suspect you knew that anyway.

We will have a statement on the situation in Syria on Tuesday. If in the eyes of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) certain issues have not been covered satisfactorily, he will be able to raise them in the foreign affairs debate that follows. There will be an opportunity for him to raise these immensely serious issues. They are often difficult for us to address from here, but I remind him that we are the second largest international

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donor to the different groups that are trying to provide humanitarian and other support to those who have been affected by the Syrian war.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): As football seems to be the theme, I am sure that the Leader of the House will want to congratulate Partick Thistle on its 140th anniversary, as noted in early-day motion 001 of this Session.

[That this House congratulates Partick Thistle Football Club on its 140th anniversary; notes that the team's first recorded match was played at Overnewton Park, Partick, on 19 February 1876, and that since 1909 the club has been based at Firhill Stadium in the Maryhill area of Glasgow; welcomes the economic, social and cultural contribution the club has made to the city throughout its history; further notes, in particular, its commitment to promoting a family-friendly atmosphere at its games and its outreach work to develop new generations of players and fans; commends the team for securing a fourth successive year in the top flight of Scottish football; notes the popularity of the team's distinctive mascot Kingsley, designed by Turner Prize-nominated artist David Shrigley; recognises that 2016 also marks 95 years since the team won the Scottish Cup in 1921, and 45 years since the club's famous League Cup victory in 1971; and is nevertheless confident that the mighty Jags will not keep its supporters waiting too much longer for more silverware.]

When will the Government publish their response to the Procedure Committee's report on private Members' Bills, and when will we have a debate and a vote on the recommendations in that report?

Chris Grayling: I am happy to congratulate Partick Thistle on their anniversary. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is looking forward to a successful season next season, and will probably be in the stands on many Saturdays.

We will respond to the Procedure Committee's report on private Members' Bills in the appropriate timeframe, which I think is by 12 June.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): According to the Samaritans, 4,722 people took their life in England in 2015. While this trend is in a 30-year decline, in recent years it has worryingly been rising again to the highest level since 2004. May we have a debate on the implementation of the Government's suicide prevention strategy for England and how the Government might assist further the prevention of suicides?

Chris Grayling: This is, of course, a serious issue. We have seen an upward trend in recent times, particularly among young men. Suicide prevention is a focus for the Government. It is one reason why we are trying to put more resource into providing proper mental health support. Mental health is a crucial area of our health service, and something that we must do as well as we can. The Health Secretary will be here on Monday for the public services debate, and I would encourage the hon. Gentleman to bring up the subject of mental health then so that it remains very much in the sights of the Department of Health.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Was the hon. Gentleman here at the start of business questions?

Bob Blackman: I was, shall we say, answering a call of nature, Mr Speaker. Forgive me, but I was not here. I am tempted to rise because I was at St James Park on Sunday for the calamity.

Mr Speaker: I will give the hon. Gentleman the benefit of the doubt.

Bob Blackman: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can we find time for a debate about garden waste collection? In the borough of Harrow, the council has decided to charge residents £40 for six months of collections, and the collections are not even being made. I am receiving complaints on a daily basis about this, and it is time that we raised the issue in the House so that hon. Members on both sides can comment on the calamity of some of the rubbish collections across this country.

Chris Grayling: I can well understand how frustrating it is for my hon. Friend and his constituents, but with his experience as deputy Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, he is better placed than almost anyone to introduce such a debate, and I am sure that he will do so.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): British soldiers are concerned about the safety of the new Virtus body armour they have been issued with. If they fall to the ground, they cannot get up, and they cannot get their armour on in the dark. This is incredibly dangerous. The Ministry of Defence says that it is working with the supplier to make improvements, but why issue kit in the first place that puts soldiers' safety in jeopardy? May we have a statement on how MOD systems have failed and, more important, how the procurement systems can be changed to stop this happening again?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady raises an obviously serious matter. As I said earlier, apart from the Syria statement, there will be a debate on defence matters on Tuesday afternoon and she may wish to bring the issue to the attention of Ministers then.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I find myself in the curious position of echoing the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), but I assure the House that it is entirely coincidental. May I ask the Leader of the House for a debate in Government time on the BBC White Paper? The urgent question and the statement took place before publication last week and there remains considerable public disquiet about the Government's ideological motives, as well as the Government's ability to pack the unitary board with friends and placemen who could have a direct influence on the editorial policy of the BBC.

Chris Grayling: Let us be clear: the proposed unitary board of the BBC is not responsible for editorial policy; the director-general remains responsible for editorial policy. The influence of the board is after broadcast, not before it, which is the way it has been in the past with the BBC Trust and the way it should continue. The elements of the White Paper that require legislation will

be debated in this House and there will be plenty of opportunities to question the Secretary of State before we get anywhere near the formal charter renewal.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): My local authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, with Warrington Borough Council and Cheshire East Council, is locked in talks with the Department for Communities and Local Government about a devolution deal for the area. I welcome devolution in principle, but there seems to be a strange insistence on elected mayors. The area I am talking about is so broad and large, bordered by north Wales on one side and Greater Manchester on the other, that I question the suitability of an elected mayor. May we have a debate on the necessity of elected mayors in areas outside city regions?

Chris Grayling: The whole point of the devolution package is that we are offering additional powers to local communities, but we need them to come to use with a credible governance structure for managing those additional powers. A variety of deals are being done across the country. Not all are identical and not all involve the same structures for local government; the one thing they have in common is that to go ahead, we have to have confidence that they can deliver what is necessary. I am sure that is no different in Cheshire.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I have a constituent, Elaine, who has an hereditary muscle-wasting paraplegia condition. Despite being on disability living allowance since she was five years old, Elaine, now in her early 20s, did not qualify for a personal independence payment. That in itself is outrageous, but on looking into the wider issue we find that half of all PIP awards are for three years or less, meaning that people with degenerative muscle diseases undergo continual reassessments, which is not only cruel but a waste of money. Can we have a proper debate on the impact of PIP and the medical assessments in the roll-out of the system?

Chris Grayling: Clearly cases involving such diseases are immensely serious and immensely problematic for those affected, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that in Scotland these are devolved matters, so perhaps this is the wrong forum for such a debate.

Term-time Holidays

10.13 am

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the recent decision by the High Court on the right of parents to take their children on holiday during term time.

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): The High Court oral judgment represents a significant threat to one of the Government's most important achievements in education in the past six years: improving school attendance. For this reason, the Government will do everything in their power to ensure that headteachers are able to keep children in school.

There is abundant academic evidence showing that time spent in school is one of the single strongest determinants of a pupil's academic success. At secondary school, even a week off can have a significant impact on a pupil's GCSE grades. This is unfair to children and potentially damaging to their life chances. That is why we have unashamedly pursued a zero-tolerance policy on unauthorised absence. We have increased the fines issued to parents of pupils with persistent unauthorised absence, placed greater emphasis on school attendance levels in inspection outcomes and, crucially, we have clamped down on the practice of taking term-time holidays. Those measures have been strikingly successful: the number of persistent absentees in this country's schools has dropped by over 40%, from 433,000 in 2010 to 246,000 in 2015, and some 4 million fewer days are lost due to unauthorised absence compared with 2012-2013. Overall absence rates have followed a significant downward trend from 6.5% in the academic year ending in 2007 to 4.6% in the academic year ending in 2015.

These are not just statistics. They mean that pupils are spending many more hours in school, being taught the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life. It is for this reason that we amended the 2006 attendance regulations in 2013. Previously headteachers were permitted to grant a family holiday during term time for "special circumstances" of up to 10 days per school year. Of course, the need to take time off school in exceptional circumstances is important, but there are no special circumstances where a 10-day family holiday to Disney World should be allowed to trump the importance of school. The rules must apply to everyone as a matter of social justice. When parents with the income available to take their children out of school go to Florida, it sends a message to everyone that school attendance is not important.

The measure has been welcomed by teachers and schools. Unauthorised absences do not affect just the child who is absent; they damage everyone's education as teachers find themselves having to play catch-up. Because learning is cumulative, pupils cannot understand the division of fractions if they have not first understood their multiplication. Pupils cannot understand why world war one ended if they do not know why it started, and they cannot enjoy the second half of a novel if they have not read the first half. If a vital block of prerequisite knowledge is missed in April, a pupil's understanding of the subject will be harmed in May.

[Mr Nick Gibb]

The Government understand, however, that many school holidays being taken at roughly the same time leads to a hike in prices. That is precisely the reason that we have given academies the power to set their own term dates in a way that works for their parents and their local communities. Already schools such as Hatcham College in London and the David Young Community Academy in Leeds are doing just that. In areas of the country such as the south-west, where a large number of the local population are employed in the tourist industry, there is nothing to stop schools clubbing together and collectively changing or extending the dates of their summer holidays or doing so as part of a multi-academy trust. In fact, this Government would encourage them to do so.

Mr Speaker: Has the Minister concluded?

Mr Gibb: I am about to conclude, Mr Speaker.

We are awaiting the written judgment from the High Court and will outline our next steps in due course. The House should be assured that we will seek to take whatever measures are necessary to give schools and local authorities the power and clarity to ensure that children attend school when they should.

Steve Double: I thank the Minister for his answer. However, there is another aspect to the policy which, sadly, has been ignored up till now—the economic impact of the policy on tourist areas, particularly in Cornwall. In 2014 a published report indicated that the tourist industry in Cornwall had lost £50 million as a result.

With respect to the Minister, there is no prospect of social mobility for a family if the parents lose their job or have their hours cut because of the downturn in the tourism industry and the way that that affects their jobs. Is it not the case that only 8% of school absenteeism is a result of family holidays? There is no drop-off in the attainment of those children. Family holidays are good for children. They widen their knowledge of the world and expose them to new experiences, and children whose family take them on a holiday often perform better as a direct result.

Will the Minister please look at the matter again? If he is going to bring forward measures to tighten the rules or strengthen them, can he assure the House that there will be a full debate in this Chamber, that the changes to the rules will not be made through secondary legislation, that this time a full impact assessment will be carried out that includes the economic impact on tourism-related industries, that the family test will be applied to the measures, and that a full public consultation will take place that considers the impact on all stakeholders—not just education, but the wider society and families especially?

Mr Gibb: Before 2013 authorised family holidays made up between 5% and 6% of pupil absences. That figure dropped to 2.3% in 2013-14 and to 1.2% in 2014-15. With the greatest respect to my hon. Friend, I do not believe that we should be returning to the Dickensian world where the needs of industry and commerce take precedence over the education of children.

His constituency of St Austell and Newquay, in the beautiful county of Cornwall, has a hugely successful and thriving tourism industry that generates about £2 billion of income for the UK economy. I doubt that the Cornish tourism industry will be best pleased by his assertion that tourism in Cornwall is dependent on truanting children for its survival.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Another week, another crisis for the Department for Education: Ministers really do need to get a grip. Their obsession with school structures means that they focus on the wrong issues and fail to deal with the bread-and-butter issues that matter to parents.

All the evidence shows that regular attendance at school is crucial to ensuring that children fulfil their potential, and 100% attendance records should be the ambition of all children in all schools. However, this problem is of the Government's own making. When changing the guidance to headteachers back in 2013, they should have carried out a full impact assessment much earlier and acted to address concerns. Back in the autumn, the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) led a Westminster Hall debate on the 50,000-strong petition on this subject. The Government said then that they would look at the concerns raised, so they have known that this ruling was coming for a long time—they could have clarified the law and they have not.

This ruling is the worst of both worlds. It puts parents and headteachers in a very difficult position and is not in the best interests of children. By and large, the system up to 2012, with heads having a small amount of discretion, was working well. Parents and headteachers had a clear signal that children should be in school. It is right that headteachers who know their parents and school community well, and are accountable for their children and school, should have appropriate discretion. Will the Minister pledge to work with all interested parties across this House and outside this House to clarify the law in the interests of pupils, schools and parents? We pledge to work with him on that.

The reality is that Ministers have been asleep at the wheel, focusing on the wrong issues when we have teacher shortages and problems in primary assessment. It is time for them to take their head out of the sand and deal with these fundamental issues rather than fixating on school types at the expense of raising school standards. Will the Minister do that now?

Mr Gibb: I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, but I do feel that he is not on the same side as us with regard to raising school standards. Improving school attendance is absolutely key to raising academic standards. Under the previous Labour Government, it became accepted wisdom that parents could take their children out of school for term-time holidays for up to 10 days a year. Those numbers were causing an issue for us. We had to address the problem that we inherited from the previous Labour Government—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister of State is going about his duty in the conscientious way that we have come to expect. A significant number of young children are observing our proceedings this morning, and I

rather doubt they will be greatly impressed by the Front-Bench deputies on each side of the House conducting a kind of verbal tug of war from which each of them should desist, partly in consideration of the children and partly out of respect for the Minister of State, from whom we should hear.

Mr Gibb: I am most grateful to you, Mr Speaker.

Under the previous Labour Government it had become accepted wisdom that parents could take their children out of school for term-time holidays for up to 10 days a year. We had to address that popular perception, and that is why the regulations were changed in 2013. In 2012, 32.7 million pupil days were lost owing to authorised absences. That figure has fallen to 28.6 million in 2014-15—that is, some 4 million fewer pupil school days lost as a consequence of the changes to the 2013 regulations. That is a huge success, and I wish that the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) would support the change.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that taking children out of school to come to the mother of all Parliaments to learn about our democracy is one thing, but taking them to Orlando, Florida is another? I welcome the rigour that he has brought to the subject of education, moving away from the “playways” type of Labour approach. Does he agree that if this country is going to succeed, it needs to take education seriously?

Mr Gibb: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. This is about social justice. When parents with income take their children out of school to go to Florida, that sends a message to everyone that school attendance is not important. There is no circumstance in which a trip to Disney World can be regarded as educational.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am very fond of the Minister and have always thought that he has a touch of the Dickens novel about him. Is it not a very serious and fundamental problem that we still squeeze the summer holidays into a six-week period, during which British Airways charges the earth to go anywhere and Center Parcs trebles its rates? We need to tackle that very serious problem, for everyone’s benefit. I have constituents who face great pressure from the Muslim community, especially from Pakistan, to take their children out, and they are the very children who have been suffering. I am on the side of being tough, but let us look at the issue in a more fundamental way.

Mr Gibb: The hon. Gentleman, for whom I have huge admiration for his work as the former chair of the Education Committee, is right. We need to look at these issues in a more fundamental way. That is why we have given academies the freedom to set their term dates. I say to the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, to my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) that they should be helping to co-ordinate schools so that they set different term dates that help their own tourism industries.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): Does the Minister agree that educational attainment is directly correlated to attendance and that narrowing the attainment gap and raising standards must be a priority for any Government who care about the future of our children?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is ample evidence that even taking a few days off school can have a serious effect on a child’s education, particularly in those secondary school years leading up to GCSE, but also in primary education, where the pattern of attendance is set. Charlie Taylor, our behavioural expert in the last Parliament, took the view that it is more important to set the precedent in primary school, so that when children enter secondary school they are already in the habit of attending school every day.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Government underline the importance of giving heads autonomy, which I support in almost all cases, perhaps with the exception of the unacceptable opt-outs in relation to sex education. On term-time absences, does the Minister agree that some holidays or attendance at, for instance, family funerals abroad can be informative, educational or necessary, and that heads should have the autonomy and discretion to decide whether, in those exceptional circumstances, children should be allowed term-time absences? Should not the law reflect that?

Mr Gibb: The right hon. Gentleman accurately reflects the law as it stands: headteachers do have the discretion to grant term-time absence in exceptional circumstances, including funerals, which he cited. However, a term-time holiday to take advantage of lower prices would not be regarded as an exceptional circumstance.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Following on the same theme, the Government have been consistent in saying that they believe that schools should have more freedom from the state in making decisions. Does the Minister believe that schools should not have such freedoms in this particular case, or have the schools asked him to relieve them of them? Whatever the rights and wrongs of the particular issue, it is clearly inconsistent with the Government’s belief in giving school’s greater freedoms.

Mr Gibb: The schools themselves will have increased freedoms if they adopt academy status, including over term dates and the curriculum, but there are rules that apply to individuals. There is no freedom for an individual not to educate their children: they either have to attend school or obtain education otherwise. That is the law. This is about the law that applies to parents. We want a society where education is compulsory for all children in our country.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): But the Minister must acknowledge the limbo that schools now find themselves in. Headteachers know precisely what the regulations say, but they also know what the High Court ruling was. Will he clarify for the benefit of the headteachers who might be listening what he thinks should take precedent—the High Court judgment or the regulations as they stand? If it is the High Court judgment, how quickly will the Government come back to the House to assert what they want to happen?

Mr Gibb: We are still waiting to receive the written judgment of the High Court, and as soon as we do we will revert to the hon. Gentleman and the House.

William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): It is irrefutable that good school attendance is essential for both progress and achievement. Does my hon. Friend share my concern

[William Wragg]

that the High Court judgment used a 90% attendance threshold, whereas Ofsted criticises and penalises schools with attendance below 95%?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend makes a good point. A 10% absence rate equates to one day off a fortnight, and I do not think we should encourage that type of attendance record in our schools.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): We have heard a lot from the Minister about tackling the symptoms of the problem, but I do not believe enough is being done to tackle the cause, which is companies getting away with charging astronomical prices in holiday time and ordinary prices in term time. When will the Government do something to tackle the rip-off culture that pervades our society?

Mr Gibb: That issue was examined some years ago, and it was determined that it is not a case of the holiday companies ripping off their consumers. Hotels around the world and in this country simply charge higher rates during the summer months and the peak seasons than they do out of peak, which is a matter of market economics.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Mr Platt is a resident of my island, and it is Isle of Wight Council's unfathomable decision to take him to court that has brought about the current situation. It seems to me that the legislation is quite clear: it is for the headteacher to decide what constitutes exceptional circumstances. The head is undoubtedly in the best position to take account of the full picture of any request for absence. It is hard to envisage legislation, or even guidance, devised here or in Whitehall, that could properly take account of all possible exceptional circumstances. Do the Government intend to take the decision away from the person who is ultimately responsible for the performance of their school?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend explains the situation accurately. It is for the headteacher to determine whether there are exceptional circumstances so that they can grant authorised absences.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The situation obviously lacks clarity after this judgment, and I was concerned that there was a lack of clarity even before the judgment, which I hoped the Minister might turn his attention to. I had a constituency case in which children were denied the opportunity to go to Spain for the funeral of their Spanish grandmother. Will he consider providing headteachers with greater clarity to ensure that such travel is considered an exceptional circumstance?

Mr Gibb: I think the situation before the High Court judgment was clear—the headteacher has discretion on whether to grant authorised absence, and can do so only in exceptional circumstances. The National Association of Head Teachers has helpfully produced a two-page guidance note setting out what it believes its members should consider when determining whether an absence should be authorised. It makes it clear that funerals should be regarded as an exceptional circumstance.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): People in land-based employment feel frustrated by term times and holidays based in an agrarian past. Does my hon. Friend agree that communities in rural locations often have small village schools that stand to suffer disproportionately in the event of disruption in the classroom due to absences such as he has described?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend makes a very valid point. This is about not just pupils' education but the challenge presented to teachers as they seek to deliver catch-up lessons for pupils who have been absent. In a small school with small class sizes, that is doubly difficult for teachers.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): What assistance and education can the Minister give parents who are deciding whether to take their children out of school? It seems that a minority of parents are making the wrong decision, so can he supply them with any more information on the impact of removing those children from school at the time they choose?

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and we must emphasise evidence that suggests that even small absences from school will have a long-term impact on a child's education. As I set out in my opening remarks, a lot of education is linear, and children must learn one thing before they learn another. If a teacher is not able to provide a catch-up lesson for that child, they will permanently miss out on a crucial part of their education.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have taken positive steps to reduce the cost of family holidays, and therefore the financial incentive to take term-time absence? By reducing air passenger duty for children's tickets to zero, last year 4.5 million children under 12 flew tax free, and this year more than 7.5 million of those under 16 will fly tax free.

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend made that point better than I could have done.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Although I agree with the thrust of the Government's response and their determination to raise standards, I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). When a number of schools have a high concentration of parents who work in the tourism industry and on relatively low pay, and when there has not been a significant enough change in the cost of holidays and there is no momentum around changes to term times, a number of factors come together. I urge the Minister to enter into more constructive dialogue about what can be done for regional economies where this issue will have a significant effect.

Mr Gibb: I am happy to enter into a constructive dialogue with my hon. Friend, and with my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). We have given academies discretion to set their own term dates, and I urge all hon. Members who represent areas with high levels of tourism to work with their

schools, the local authority, and other local authorities, to find a way to set term dates that reflect the needs of their local communities.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): My hon. Friend will know that when children are absent from school, it is disruptive to the child who misses school but also to the class when they try to catch up. One experiment currently being tried is to extend the school day by 30 minutes, and extend half term from one week to two weeks in certain areas, to allow parents to take their children on holiday for two weeks. What does the Minister think of that idea?

Mr Gibb: That is precisely the kind of idea that we hope and expect will come from the discretion that we have granted academies in this country, and many schools are taking advantage of that freedom.

Junior Doctors Contract

10.38 am

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the junior doctors contract.

For the last three years there have been repeated attempts to reform the junior doctors contract to support better patient care seven days a week, culminating in a damaging industrial relations dispute that lasted for more than 10 months. I am pleased to inform the House that after 10 days of intensive discussion under the auspices of ACAS, the dispute was resolved yesterday with a historic agreement between the Government, NHS Employers—acting on behalf of the employers of junior doctors—and the British Medical Association that will modernise the contract by making it better for both doctors and patients. The new contract meets all the Government's red lines for delivering a seven-day NHS, and remains within the existing pay envelope. We will publish an equalities analysis of the new terms alongside a revised contract at the end of the month, and it will be put to a ballot of the BMA membership next month, with the support of its leader, the chair of the junior doctors committee of the BMA, Johann Malawana.

I express my thanks to the BMA for the leadership it has shown in returning to talks, negotiating in good faith, and making an agreement possible. I also put on record my thanks to Sir Brendan Barber, the chair of ACAS, for his excellent stewardship of the process, and to Sir David Dalton for his wisdom and insight in conducting discussions on behalf of employers and the Government, both this time and earlier in the year. The agreement will facilitate the biggest changes to the junior doctors contract since 1999. It will allow the Government to deliver a seven-day NHS, improve patient safety and support much needed productivity improvements, as well as strengthening the morale and quality of life of junior doctors with a modern contract fit for a modern health service.

The contract inherited by the Government had a number of features badly in need of reform, including low levels of basic pay as a proportion of total income, which made doctors rely too heavily on unpredictable unsocial hours supplements to boost their income; automatic annual pay rises even when people took prolonged periods of leave from the NHS; an unfair banding system that triggered payment of premium rates to every team member even if only one person had worked extra hours; high premium rates payable for weekend work that made it difficult to roster staff in line with patient need; and risks to patient safety, with doctors sometimes required to work seven full days or seven full nights in a row without proper rest periods.

The Government have always been determined that our NHS should offer the safest, highest quality of care possible, which means a consistent standard of care for patients admitted across all seven days of the week. The new contract agreed yesterday makes the biggest set of changes to the junior doctors contract for 17 years, including by establishing the principle that any doctor who works less than an average of one weekend day a month—Saturday or Sunday—should receive no additional premium pay, compensated for by an increase in basic

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

pay of between 10% and 11%; by reducing the marginal cost of employing additional doctors at the weekend by about a third; by supporting all hospitals to meet the four clinical standards most important for reducing mortality rates for weekend admissions by establishing a new role for experienced junior doctors as senior clinical decision makers able to make expert assessments of vulnerable patients admitted to or staying in hospital over weekends; and by removing the disincentive to roster enough doctors at weekends by replacing an inflexible banding system with a fairer system that values weekend work by paying people for actual unsocial hours worked, with more pay for those who work the most.

The Government also recognise that safer care for patients is more likely to be provided by well-motivated doctors who have sufficient rest between shifts and work in a family-friendly system. The new contract and ACAS agreement will improve the wellbeing of our critical junior doctor workforce by reducing the maximum hours a doctor can be asked to work in any one week from 91 to 72; reducing the number of nights a doctor can be asked to work consecutively to four, and the number of long days a doctor can be asked to work to five; introducing a new post, a guardian of safe working, in every trust to guard against doctors being asked to work excessive hours; introducing a new catch-up programme for doctors who take maternity leave or time off for other caring responsibilities; establishing a review by Health Education England to consider how best to allow couples to apply to train in the same area and to offer training placements for those with caring responsibilities close to their home; giving pay protection to doctors who switch specialties because of caring responsibilities; and establishing a review to inform a new requirement for trusts to consider caring and other family responsibilities when designing rotas.

Taken together, these changes show both the Government's commitment to safe care for patients and the value we attach to the role of junior doctors. While they do not remove every bugbear or frustration, they will significantly improve flexibility and work-life balance for doctors, leading, we hope, to improved retention rates, higher morale and better care for patients.

Whatever the progress made with today's landmark changes, however, it will always be a matter of great regret that it was necessary to go through such disruptive industrial action to get there. We may welcome the destination, but no one could have wanted the journey, so today I say to all junior doctors, whatever our disagreements about the contract may have been, that the Government have heard and understood the wider frustrations they feel about the way they are valued and treated in the NHS. Our priority will always be the safety of patients, but we also recognise that to deliver high-quality care we need a well-motivated and happy junior doctor workforce. Putting a new modern contract in place is not the end of the story. We will continue to engage constructively to try to resolve outstanding issues, as we proceed on our journey to tackle head on the challenges the NHS faces, and make it the safest, highest-quality healthcare system anywhere in the world. Today's agreement shows we can make common cause on that

journey with a contract that is better for patients, better for doctors and better for the NHS. I commend my statement to the House.

10.45 am

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): I start by putting on record our thanks to Sir Brendan Barber and ACAS for the role they have played in finding agreement between the two sides in this dispute. I also pay tribute to the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, which proposed these further talks and encouraged both the Government and the BMA to pause and think about patients.

I have not been shy in telling the Health Secretary what I think about his handling of this dispute, but today is not the day to repeat those criticisms. I am pleased and relieved that an agreement has been reached, but I am sad that it took an all-out strike of junior doctors to get the Government back to the table. What is now clear, if it was not already, is that a negotiated agreement was possible all along. I have to ask the Health Secretary why this deal could not have been struck in February. Why did he allow his pride back then to come before sensible compromise and constructive talks?

When he stands up to reply, he may try to blame the BMA for the breakdown in the negotiations, but he failed to say what options he was prepared to consider in order to ensure that the junior doctors who work the most unsociable hours are fairly rewarded. It was a "computer says no" attitude, and that is no way to run the NHS.

Why did the Health Secretary ignore my letter to him of 7 February, in which I asked him to make an explicit and public commitment to further concessions on the issue of unsociable hours? I was clear that if he had done that then, I would have encouraged the BMA to return to talks. Why did he insist instead on trying to bulldoze an imposed contract through, when virtually everyone told him not to, and the consequences of doing so were obvious for all to see—protracted industrial action, destroyed morale and a complete breakdown in trust?

On the detail of the new contract, will the Health Secretary say a little more about the agreed changes that will undo the discriminatory effect on women of the last contract he published? Does he now accept that the previous contract discriminated against women? Will he be clear for the record that he now understands this was never "just about pay"? Can he confirm that concessions have been made not only in respect of the mechanism for enforcing hours worked and breaks taken, but in ensuring that the specialties with the biggest recruitment problems have decent incentives built into the contract?

Moving on to what happens next, can the Health Secretary tell us what he will do if junior doctors vote against this offer? Will he still impose a contract, and which version of the contract will he impose—his preferred version or this compromised one? Can he say whether the possibility of losing a case in the High Court about his power to impose a contract had anything to do with his recently discovered eagerness to return to talks? We all know that the High Court told him he had acted

above the law when he tried to take the axe to my local hospital, so I can understand why he does not want that embarrassment again.

Finally, let me caution the Health Secretary on his use of language both in this Chamber and in the media. His loose words and implied criticism of junior doctors is partly the reason why this has ended up being such an almighty mess. May I suggest that a degree of humility on the part of the Secretary of State would not go amiss? May I recommend a period of radio silence from him to allow junior doctors to consider the new contract with clear minds, and without his spin echoing in their ears? I remind him that he still needs to persuade a majority of junior doctors to vote in favour of the contract for the dispute to be finally over.

I hope with all my heart that yesterday's agreement may offer a way forward. Junior doctors will want to consider it; trust needs to be repaired, and that will take time. I hope for the sake of everyone, patients and doctors, that we may now see an end to this very sorry episode in NHS history.

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady is wrong today, as she has been wrong throughout this dispute. In the last 10 months, she has spent a great deal of time criticising the way in which the Government have sought to change the contract. What she has not dwelt on, however, is the reason it needed to be changed in the first place, namely the flawed contract for junior doctors that was introduced in 1999.

We have many disagreements with the BMA, but we agree on one thing: Labour's contract was not fit for purpose. Criticising the Government for trying to put that contract right is like criticising a mechanic for mending the car that you just crashed. It is time that the hon. Lady acknowledged that those contract changes 17 years ago have led to a number of the five-day care problems that we are now trying to sort out.

The hon. Lady was wrong to say that an all-out strike was necessary to resolve the dispute. The meaningful talks that we have had have worked in the last 10 days because the BMA bravely changed its position, and agreed to negotiate on weekend pay. The hon. Lady told the House four times before that change of heart that we should not impose a new contract. What would have happened if we had followed her advice? Quite simply, we would not have seen the biggest single step towards a seven-day NHS for a generation, the biggest reforms of unsocial hours for 17 years, and the extra cost of employing a doctor at weekends going down by a third. We would not have seen the reductions in maximum working hours. We would not have seen many, many other changes that have improved the safety of patients and the quality of life of doctors.

The hon. Lady was also wrong to say that the previous contract discriminated against women. In fact, it removed discrimination. Does that mean that there are not more things that we can do to support women who work as junior doctors? No, it does not. The new deal that was announced yesterday provides for an important new catch-up clause for women who take maternity leave, which means that they can return to the position in which they would have been if they had not had to take time off to have children.

The hon. Lady asked what would happen if the ballot went the wrong way. What she failed to say was whether she was encouraging junior doctors to vote for the deal. Let me remind her that on 28 October, she told the House that she supported the principle of seven-day services. As Tony Blair once said, however, one cannot will the end without willing the means. The hon. Lady has refused to say whether she supported the withdrawal of emergency care, she has refused to say whether she supports contentious changes to reform premium pay, and now she will not even say whether doctors should vote for the new agreement.

Leadership means facing up to difficult decisions, not ducking them. I say to the hon. Lady that this Government are prepared to make difficult decisions and fight battles that improve the quality and safety of care in the NHS. If she is not willing to fight those battles, that is fine, but she should not stand at the Dispatch Box and claim that Labour stands up for NHS patients. If she does not want to listen to me, perhaps she should listen to former Labour Minister Tom Harris, who said:

“Strategically Labour should be on the side of the patients and we aren't.”

Well, if Labour is not, the Conservatives are.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I congratulate both sides on returning to constructive negotiations and on reaching an agreement. I pay particular tribute to Professor Sue Bailey and the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges for their role in bringing both sides together. I welcome the particular focus, alongside the negotiations around weekend pay, on all the other aspects that are blighting the lives of junior doctors. I welcome the recognition that we need to focus on those specialties that it is hard to recruit to and on those junior doctors who are working the longest hours, as well as the focus on patient safety.

However, we are not out of the woods yet. We need junior doctors across the country to vote for this agreement in a referendum. May I add my voice to that of the Opposition spokesman on health to say that what is needed now is a period of calm reflection? We need to build relationships with junior doctors into the future. Will the Secretary of State comment on his plans for building those relationships with our core workforce?

Mr Hunt: First, I very much agree with my hon. Friend in her thanks to Professor Dame Sue Bailey for the leadership that the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges has shown in the initiative that, in the end, made these talks and this agreement possible. I know it has been a very difficult and challenging time for the royal colleges, but Professor Bailey has shown real leadership in her initiative.

I also very much agree with my hon. Friend about the need to sort out some of the issues that have been frustrations for junior doctors—not just in the last few years, but going back decades—in terms of the way their training works and the flexibility of the system of six-month rotations that they work in. This is an opportunity to look at those wider issues. We started to look at some of them yesterday. I think there is more that we can do.

It is important that this is seen not as one side winning and the other side losing, but as a win-win. What the last 10 days show is that if we sit round the

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table, we can make real progress, with a better deal for patients and a better deal for doctors. That is the spirit that we want to go forward in.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I absolutely welcome this agreement, and I pay tribute to the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges for bringing it about. I do wish there had been some response to the letter that I and other Members sent before the all-out strike, because it was a genuine attempt to create a space that both sides could step into. However, I am glad that we have got to that stage now.

I welcome the recognition of the equality issues, which, to us and to many junior doctors, appeared to have been dismissed in the impact assessment. On the idea of flexible training champions in each trust, I myself was a flexible training senior surgeon—indeed, the first one in Scotland—and the idea of accelerated training is important. However, one concern I have is about childcare. If women junior doctors are going to be working longer, more antisocial shifts—I remember what I had to fork out for childcare—I would like to know whether the NHS will respond to that. Will that be in the form of crèche hours or support?

I welcome the fact that the hours guardian will be linked to the director of medical education and that there will be an elected junior doctors forum. One concern of junior doctors was that they would have no voice in relation to the guardian.

I also welcome the idea of using modern technology in rota-ing. At the moment, rotas are sheets of paper, and often no one looks at the shoulder from one rota to the next, so people can end up with the very long periods on call. However, one concern that remains is rota gaps. We do not have enough junior doctors, and we do not have enough junior doctors in the most acute specialties. How is the Secretary of State planning to re-establish a relationship? How is he going to recruit people to fill that gap? That was the core fear of junior doctors: a lack of doctors, with doctors simply being spread further. How are we going to recruit and retain doctors after the painful clash that has been going on for the last year?

Mr Hunt: I welcome the tone of the hon. Lady's comments; we might have wished for a similar tone from the shadow Health Secretary. Let me address the comments of the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) as constructively as she made them to me. She is right about flexible training. We have to recognise that the junior doctor workforce is now majority female, and that a number of family and caring pressures need to be taken account of. We need to do that for the NHS not only because it is the right thing to do, but because we will lose people if we do not. Those people will simply leave medicine, even though they have been through very extensive and expensive training.

We have to look particularly at the responsibilities of doctors with young children. One of the things that we announced yesterday was an obligation on trusts to take account of caring responsibilities. If, for example, a doctor wanted to work fewer hours in school holidays and more hours in term time, we cannot guarantee that a hospital would always be able meet those needs—the

needs of patients always have to come first—but they could at least be taken account of, in the same way as they are in many other industries that operate 24/7. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that modern technology is key to that. An air steward or a pilot who works for British Airways can go on to an electronic system and choose the shifts and hours that they want to work. Because we have failed to modernise the NHS, we have seen a huge growth in agency and locum work, which is partly driven by the fact that it offers precisely the flexibilities that people need. These are important changes, and we intend to take them forward.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): My right hon. Friend's actions and those of the Department and the BMA in reaching an agreement will be warmly welcomed and met with a sigh of relief. Does he accept that the fact that the BMA was prepared to think again on crucial issues, such as overtime at weekends, should be seen as a sign not of weakness but of maturity, in working with the Government to ensure that we have a seven-day NHS that is for the benefit of patients and patient safety?

Mr Hunt: I absolutely agree with that wise comment, and it befits someone who is experienced in working in the Department of Health. We always get further if we sit around the table and talk about such issues. The Government are determined to improve the quality and safety of care for patients, and it is important to recognise that if the Government are successful, it will be better for the morale of doctors. The happiest, most motivated doctors work in the hospitals that are giving the best care to patients. That is why it is a win-win.

I say to Labour Members that it was the refusal of the BMA for many years to talk about the issue that my right hon. Friend referred to that meant we reached a deadlock. The fact that the Government were willing to proceed with important reforms on our own if we had to meant that, in the end, everyone came together and had a sensible negotiation. We got to the right place. I am sure everyone wishes that we had not had to go on the journey we went on to get there, but now that we have got there, I think it is the time for being constructive on all sides.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I also thank the Minister and the BMA for coming to an agreement. The Minister said that it was a win-win for everyone, and so it is. It is always good to talk, and dialogue brings results. That happened in Northern Ireland, and it has happened with the conclusion of this process as well. A good deal has been reached, and some 45,000 junior doctor BMA members will now be asked to vote on it.

We have had eight days of strikes since January, and some 40,000 planned non-urgent operations and 100,000 out-patient appointments have been cancelled. May I ask the Minister what will be done to catch those up, and what discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Assembly about the agreement?

Mr Hunt: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are in constant touch with the devolved regions and countries to make sure that they know the changes that we are making, and to share any learning that we have from the processes that we have been through, so we will

certainly do that. Across the country, we are doing everything we can to catch up with the backlog of operations, procedures and out-patient appointments—all the things that have been affected by the industrial relations dispute. Trusts will always prioritise the areas where clinical need is the greatest, but I know that that work is ongoing across the country.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I very much welcome the agreement that has been reached. We know that the Secretary of State recognises the importance of having a happy and well-motivated workforce, and this contract addresses many of the causes of unhappiness for junior doctors. It is particularly good to hear the points made today about addressing the problems of couples who are both junior doctors. However, there is clearly more to do, as has been acknowledged, especially on the reasons why junior doctors feel unsupported and often not valued by their employers. My right hon. Friend commissioned Professor Sue Bailey to carry out a review of the underlying problems experienced by junior doctors during training. Will he advise us whether the review will now proceed?

Mr Hunt: The request from the BMA was to find a new way of proceeding with that very important work, and that is what we will do. We will do so with the input of Professor Bailey, because she has a very important contribution to make. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that, as well as more flexible working for people with family commitments, the big issue for many junior doctors is the way in which the training process happens. In particular, the issue is about the way that continuity of training has been undermined by the new shift system—we need that system for reasons of patient safety—and that often means that someone is given advice by a different consultant on different aspects of care from one day to the next, which is frustrating. We will look at all those issues with Professor Bailey, Health Education England and the BMA to see whether we can find a better way forward.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Secretary of State aware that even my constituents struggling with the possible closure of their A&E at the hospital in Huddersfield nevertheless welcome this announcement and thank anyone and everyone who has brought it about? That includes, I must say, leaders from the Opposition parties—our health spokespeople—who have done so much to help maintain a positive spirit. Will the Secretary of State just not gloat about this, but keep a period of silence? This is part of the phenomenon of people's deep unhappiness about the NHS. Problems will arise again because so many people working in the NHS know it is being privatised by the back door and know that the clinical commissioning system is not working. Those problems will come back again and again unless he confronts that issue.

Mr Hunt: That would have been a constructive contribution to this morning's discussion if the hon. Gentleman had not descended into totally false slurs about this Government's commitment to our NHS. I would just say to him that if people support and are passionate about the NHS, as this Government are, then they put in the money—we are putting in £5.5 billion more than his party promised at the last election—and

make the difficult reforms necessary to ensure that NHS care is as good as or better than anything that can be provided in the private sector. That is what this Government are doing: we believe in our NHS, and we are backing it to provide the best care available anywhere in the world.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I strongly welcome this important statement and the Secretary of State's leadership, and I congratulate all those involved in the discussions. On Tuesday, I spoke at my advice surgery in Eastleigh to a constituent, a new mum who is a junior doctor and is married to a senior nurse. She is unable to fast-track into working as a GP, and part of her concerns about the negotiations involve the future childcare arrangements for her four-month-old baby. Such concerns weigh heavily on her family, particularly in relation to on-call working. May I ask that agile working and family first issues are truly taken into account for nurses and doctors who are trying to bring up families together?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend gives one example, but there are thousands of such examples. Such people are totally committed to the NHS, have a bright future in it and can make a huge contribution to its success by doing a good job in looking after patients, but they also have home responsibilities that are difficult to fulfil when there are very inflexible rostering systems. One of the big wins from yesterday's agreement is that we will be able to look at the way the rostering system works to try to bring in such flexibility. If we do not do so, more and more doctors will want to be locums or to work for an agency and we will lose the continuity of care for patients, which is one of the best things about our GP system. That is why there is an urgent need—from the perspective of patients, as well as from that of doctors—to address that issue.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am interested in the Secretary of State's thoughts about the serious impact on morale that the dispute has had. I was talking to a junior doctor in Sheffield the other day who said that before the dispute he had never looked at his contract, he had simply got on and done what was needed, whenever it was needed. Does the Secretary of State realise that even if the dispute is now settled, as we hope, it has had a serious impact on good will in the health service, which could affect service delivery in the future?

Mr Hunt: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the latest NHS staff survey, it shows higher staff motivation, better communication and more staff recommending their organisation as a place to work or be treated. But I accept that when big changes are made to a contract such as the junior doctors contract, they can be contentious and have a short-term impact on morale. In the long run, morale goes up when doctors are able to give better care to patients, and that is what this agreement will allow.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): The Secretary of State has done a good job of explaining today, but let us look at this in the cold light of day. The BMA caused a problem that should have been resolved a long time ago. It decided it would make a political point. That is fair enough, and I know we want reflection. The Opposition should have been big

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enough to say, “We want to cause political trouble on this.” A lot of this has been caused by political shenanigans that should not have been allowed to get to this stage, and the failure means that the junior doctors have lost prestige throughout the United Kingdom because they have been used as political pawns by two organisations. Does the Secretary of State agree?

Mr Hunt: It is a great tragedy that the dispute unfolded in the way that it did, and I am sure that people with different agendas have not played constructive roles at various points. Given that we now have an agreement, I want to move forward positively and say that the lesson of the last 10 days is that when people sit down and negotiate about all the outstanding issues with a Government who are trying to make care safer and better for patients, we get a result that is good for everyone.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is not the time to claim victory: this negotiated agreement now has to be put to the members of the British Medical Association. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that his own refusal to negotiate exacerbated this crisis? Will he cease referring to the British Medical Association as a militant trade union, and will he heed the call from my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for a period of silence in order to avoid antagonising the junior doctors still further?

Mr Hunt: Let us be absolutely clear: there was never a refusal to negotiate on the Government’s side. We have now developed a lot of trust between the Government and the BMA leadership, but until that point it balloted for industrial action without even sitting down and talking to the Government, and it refused to discuss the issue of weekend pay premiums, which was the crucial change we needed for a seven-day NHS. It was when the BMA changed its position in those areas that we were able to have constructive talks, and that is why it deserves great credit for coming to the table and negotiating—something it had not wanted to do previously—and that led to the solution.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for working so hard to bring about this resolution and for always putting users of the NHS at the heart of everything he does. Will he join me in urging junior doctors to consider the new contract with an open mind when voting, and to strip out some of the politics that we have heard? Let us consider what is best for patients, what is best for the NHS and then what is best for junior doctors.

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend speaks wisely. I understand that in a contentious industrial relations dispute junior doctors will not necessarily look to me for advice on which way they should vote, but it was not just me doing the agreement. It was a negotiated agreement and the leader of the junior doctors committee says that it is a good agreement. He will encourage people to support it in the ballot and he thinks it is a good way forward for doctors as well as for patients. The people who have been closest to the detail of the negotiations think that it is the right step forward for junior doctors, and that is something that they will want to take account of.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I do not wish to invite the Secretary of State to provoke or pre-empt by presumption, but if the agreement changes the shape of services, it will have implications for other health professionals. Is he prepared to have the further conversations that will need to be had, and the wider conversations that will be needed with his ministerial counterparts across these islands on workforce planning, professional education and training?

Mr Hunt: We are, of course, willing to have those discussions with colleagues in other parts of the UK. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that having a seven-day service does not just involve junior doctors; it involves widespread changes across the service. I should say that nurses, healthcare assistants, porters, cleaners—other people who work in hospitals—already operate on 24/7 shifts, so the changes necessary to those contracts are much less profound than they are to some of the doctors contracts, which is why it is important that we change not just the junior doctors contract, but the consultants contract. The fact that we have been able to reach a negotiated agreement with the junior doctors bodes well for the consultants contract, which is the next step.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I congratulate both my right hon. Friend and the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer) on their hard work in dealing with this protracted dispute with the BMA. Patients up and down the country, including those in my constituency, were somewhat concerned about the cancellation of operations, and I am delighted that the Department is going to try to ensure that we catch up on that. One thing that came out of this dispute was that some senior consultants ended up getting on to the front line for the first time in a long time. What can be done to try to make sure that that happens on a regular basis, so that they are getting experience on the front line, too?

Mr Hunt: If I answer that question directly, I will dig myself into rather a deep hole. I echo my hon. Friend’s thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich, who has done an outstanding job by my side at every stage throughout this difficult period. I can certainly say that we would not have had yesterday’s agreement without his strong help and support at every stage. It is true that there are A&E departments across the country that, in having to plan for the two-day withdrawal of emergency care, found that having consultants more visible to patients had some positive impacts. I know that studies are going on to see what lessons can be learned from that going forward.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I, too, welcome the opportunity for a negotiated settlement, but let us take just a moment to reflect on one of the fundamental principles of our NHS—providing high-quality patient care. Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity today to offer a heartfelt and sincere apology for the significant and severe distress caused to patients as a result of this prolonged dispute?

Mr Hunt: With the greatest of respect to the hon. Lady, it was not my decision to take industrial action—to ballot for industrial action without even being prepared

to sit around the table and talk to the Government. We are seeing dramatic improvements in patient safety under this Government, as we face up to the many problems in care that we inherited, not just at Mid Staffs, but at many other places. I know that she cares about patient safety, so she should welcome the difficult changes we have made, one of which is to have a seven-day NHS.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Like many colleagues in the House, I wrote to the Secretary of State on numerous occasions over the past six months to express the concerns of local junior doctors. May I therefore congratulate him and the BMA on reaching this deal? I hope that junior doctors in Wimbledon will wholeheartedly support it. He spoke in his statement about the role of the guardian and the ability to ensure safe working hours, on behalf of both patients and doctors. Will he give a few more details about how he expects that to work?

Mr Hunt: Yes, I am happy to do that, and I thank my hon. Friend for a lot of his correspondence. The principle here is that junior doctors want to know that there is someone independent they can appeal to if they think they are being asked to work hours that are unsafe and which mean that they cannot look after patients in the way that they would want to because they are physically or mentally too exhausted. We would all want to make that possible, but it means that they need to have someone who is not their line manager. They will go to their line manager in the first instance, but they need to have someone independent and separate. One area where we have made the most progress during the past few months, even before the past 10 days of talks, is on establishing how these guardians can work in a way that has the trust of both the hospitals and the doctors working in them.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): The Secretary of State is absolutely right that we can always get further if we get round the table, so why, in response to the cross-party initiative back in February to get everybody around the table, did he not do exactly that and save us all this trouble, rather than trying to impose the contract?

Mr Hunt: The cross-party initiative was not to have a new contract, but to abandon plans for a new contract and to have pilots in a few limited places. If we had followed that advice, we would not now have agreed with the BMA the biggest changes in the junior doctors contract for 17 years. Our goal was to get the agreement that we secured yesterday—safer care for the NHS and a better deal for doctors. That was what we achieved, and we would not have got there if we had listened to that advice.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): May I join the welcome for the agreement and the persistence and patience that eventually paid off? In previous statements, I have raised with the Secretary of State the problem involving married couples who are both doctors. There are difficulties with training when they are sent to different areas and with rosters that clash. Will he say a word about the progress that has been made in this important area of making work a bit more family-friendly?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to do that for my hon. and learned Friend. It is not an easy problem to solve, because junior doctor training placements operate on six-month rotations, and they are a competitive process. We get many more applicants for a number of posts than there are posts available. We must find a way of balancing the need to respect family responsibilities, which is something that we all want to do, with the need to have a fair process for the most competitive positions. We do not have the balance right yet, so we have said that Health Education England, which decides where people are to go on rotations, will now have a duty to consider family responsibilities when it makes decisions about those rotations.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the potential resolution of this dispute and thank the Government for negotiating it. We should also thank junior doctors for having the courage to go on strike, which no one does lightly, to get a better deal for the NHS. I ask the Secretary of State to reflect on this breakthrough, to take further steps to build on his difficult relationship with NHS staff and, crucially, to stop presenting NHS policy as a false dichotomy between the interests of patients and the interests of NHS staff.

Mr Hunt: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to some of the things that I have said, he would have heard me say repeatedly that I do not think that that dichotomy exists. As he says, it is a false dichotomy because, in the end, what is right for patients is also right for doctors. The thing that demoralises doctors, nurses and everyone working in our hospitals in different parts of the NHS is when they are not able to give the care that they want or that they think is appropriate to the patients in front of them. That is why hospitals that have moved closest towards seven-day services are also some of the hospitals with the highest levels of morale in the NHS. He is right that it is a false dichotomy and that we need to do both together.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): As the Secretary of State knows, my brother and his wife were junior doctors when they made the decision to move to New Zealand a long while ago because of the long-standing cultural problems within the NHS. They will be very pleased indeed about the announcement yesterday about couples potentially being able to work together in hospitals. I have a question for the Secretary of State from my mother. She wants to know what he can do now to encourage my brother, his wife and their friends back into the NHS.

Mr Hunt: Let me say to my hon. Friend's mother that I hope that the message of this new agreement will go right the way around the world. Any doctors who have moved to New Zealand and Australia are always welcome to come back. The thing that must unite this Government and the good doctors who work, or have worked, in the NHS is our commitment to make NHS care the safest and the best in the world. We had a terrible shock with what happened at Mid Staffs, but we are using that as a moment of decisive change in the NHS, and we are well on our way to higher standards of care than are available in many other countries.

Mr Speaker: Let's hope that Mummy Howlett is satisfied. If not, I dare say that we shall hear about it.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I congratulate the Government and everyone involved on getting this deal in place. It will have a knock-on effect in my constituency in Northern Ireland. When I went around Antrim Area hospital, the concern was to do with the number of doctors, which we have heard about from other Members, and how to get seven-days-a-week cover from everything else that needs to go into the health service. Will the Secretary of State comment on how we will deal with that, and how we will work with the devolved Parliaments?

Mr Hunt: I agree. We need more doctors and we need more nurses. By the end of this Parliament, we will have over a million more over-70s in England alone, and I know that the demographic effects in Northern Ireland will be equivalent. We have a global shortage of about 7 million doctors, so we need to train more. We are training an extra 11,420 doctors over this Parliament as part of the spending review. The training is done on a UK-wide basis, so we will need to work closely with all the devolved regions on it.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I warmly welcome this draft agreement, which will be met with some relief in Cheltenham. Whatever our deeply held concerns about the behaviour of the BMA in the past, does the Secretary of State agree that it should be our ambition that the agreement will mark the beginning of a more constructive future? Will he join me in congratulating BMA negotiators, including Dr Malawana, for being prepared to address constructively issues such as Saturday pay?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to do that. I recognise that this was not easy for those people, because it involved changing a position that they had held for more than three years. When we looked at the details, the result that we got to was not difficult for them to sign up to because they could see that it really was better for their members, as well as better for patients. The lesson here is that the NHS faces huge challenges, and it can only be right to deal with them by sitting round the table and negotiating constructively.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I, too, warmly welcome the news of the agreement, and I hope that it leads to a settlement. If it is the Secretary of State's intention to create a seven-day NHS, that will require the participation of more than the junior doctors, so does he intend to bring forward a new contract for consultants, hospital lab workers, ambulance workers, nurses or indeed ancillary workers and catering staff?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is right. A seven-day NHS is not just, or not even mainly, about junior doctors, although they are a very important part of the equation. We will need a new contract for consultants and we are having constructive negotiations with them. Many other people working in the NHS are already on seven-day contracts, so there will not necessarily be a contractual change, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that we will need, for example, diagnostic services operating across seven days so that the junior doctor

who works at the weekend will be able to get the result of a test back at the weekend. Those are all part of the changes that we will introduce to make the NHS safer for patients.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I warmly congratulate both sides on reaching this agreement. Our NHS is different at weekends, and my right hon. Friend is right to inculcate Sir Bruce Keogh's four key clinical standards on a Sunday and a Saturday. Does he agree that it is important not simply to rely on mortality data, which are often difficult to interpret, to underpin the case for a seven-day NHS? Will he look closely at other metrics based on clinical standards for things like routine lists for upper gastrointestinal endoscopy on a Saturday and Sunday? Will he also look at palliative care, which of course does not feature in any hospital mortality data?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend speaks, as ever, very wisely on medical matters. I particularly agree when he talks about palliative care; it has got better, but there is a long way to go. We have recent evidence that it is particularly in need of improvement where we are not able to offer seven-day palliative support.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I welcome this settlement and thank everyone involved for securing it. However, many junior doctors remain concerned that, as the hours worked at the weekend increase, cover is inevitably reduced during the week, unless more junior doctors are employed to bridge that gap. With many rotas already left unfilled around the country during the week, how can the Secretary of State guarantee that we will not make the situation worse during the week, thereby impacting on patient safety?

Mr Hunt: I understand the concern. The short answer is that we need to increase the NHS workforce, which we are doing. We will see more doctors going into training during this Parliament, as indeed we did during the previous Parliament. More doctors in the workforce will be an important part of the solution.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It appears that at the start of the recent negotiations the payment for Saturday working was the main sticking point for the BMA, but now the issue of weekend pay has been resolved. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, now, the doctors who work extended hours over the weekend can get extra pay, and patients can get the seven-days-a-week NHS we all want?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is not just a safer deal for patients, but a system that is much fairer for doctors than the current one. We are giving a pay rise of between 10% and 11%, for which we say that people are expected to work one weekend day a month, but doctors who work more than that get more, and it goes up, so more weekends worked means more extra pay. I think that is one of the reasons why the BMA was prepared to sign up to the agreement: it values the people who give up the most weekends.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I was contacted by a constituent who told me how his four-year-old daughter fell through a pane of glass,

severely cutting her face. Unfortunately, the accident happened on a Friday evening, and because insufficient doctors were working over the weekend, she could not have an operation to remove any remaining glass from the wound until Monday, by which time the wound had started to heal and was misaligned. That four-year-old girl will suffer severe facial scarring for the rest of her life. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is why we need a seven-day NHS?

Mr Hunt: I could not put it better myself. We all hear stories of that sort from our constituents and our families. That is why, in the end, yesterday's agreement was a very positive step forward in that seven-day agenda.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I must confess to being rather puzzled. The BMA said all along that the strike and dispute had nothing to do with weekend pay and terms, yet after negotiations limited simply to weekend pay and terms, the BMA has come to a deal and advised against strike action. Can we take it that, despite much huffing and puffing from the BMA that this was about the future of the NHS and all the rest of it, at the end of the day it was all about weekend pay and terms?

Mr Hunt: I think my hon. Friend is right that that was the big sticking point. It was the BMA's willingness to be flexible and negotiate on that that ultimately made an agreement possible, but it is also fair to say that the Government recognise that there are many other non-contractual issues in the way that junior doctors are trained and treated by the NHS, and we want to use this opportunity to put them right.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on putting patients first, but does he recognise that there are still people out there whose

operations were cancelled due to industrial action? Will he look to the future and consider whether front-line medical staff should have the right to strike and so put people's health on the backburner or postpone their medical care?

Mr Hunt: I know that that is a view that some colleagues share. Doctors have obligations even now under the Medical Act 1983 not to take action that would harm patients, and under their responsibilities to the General Medical Council; they have to be aware of those. What I hope is that that question simply does not arise again. We are now having constructive discussions with the BMA; I think that is the way forward and I hope that neither I nor any future Health Secretary has to go through what has happened in the past 10 months.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I applaud the tone and content of the Secretary of State's remarks. I think this agreement will go down as a breakthrough in the NHS. It has been very uncomfortable to engage in dialogue with constituents who are junior doctors, who have felt aggrieved, so I particularly welcome the way my right hon. Friend has been able to look at non-contractual issues. I urge him to give serious consideration to the outcome of the Bailey review so that progress can be made on morale and the wider issues that have been raised.

Mr Hunt: I finish by saying that I completely agree with my hon. Friend. It has been a very sad dispute for all of us, because we all recognise that junior doctors are the backbone of the NHS; they work extremely hard and they often work the most weekends already. That we now have an agreement is a brilliant step forward. We all have constituents who work hard for the NHS. They are people we value, so dialogue, negotiation and constructive discussion must always be the way forward.

Speaker's Statement

11.34 am

Mr Speaker: In accordance with Standing Order No. 122D, I must announce the arrangements for the election of the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee for the new Session. If there is more than one candidate, the ballot will be held in Committee Room 16 from 11 am to 1.30 pm on Wednesday 25 May. Nominations must be submitted in the Table Office between 10 am and 5 pm on the day before the ballot, Tuesday 24 May. In accordance with the Standing Order, only Members who do not belong to a party represented in Her Majesty's Government may be candidates in this election. A briefing note with more details about the election will be made available to Members and published on the intranet.

BILLS PRESENTED

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Sajid Javid, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Theresa May, Secretary Nicky Morgan, Secretary Greg Clark, Matthew Hancock and Joseph Johnson, presented a Bill to make provision about higher education and research; and to make provision about alternative payments to students in higher or further education.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 4) with explanatory notes (Bill 4-EN).

FINANCE BILL

Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Order No. 80B)

Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Sajid Javid, Secretary Nicky Morgan, Secretary Greg Clark, Greg Hands, Mr David Gauke, Damian Hinds and Harriett Baldwin, presented a Bill to grant certain duties, to alter other duties, and to amend the law relating to the National Debt and the Public Revenue, and to make further provision in connection with finance.

Bill read the First and Second time without Question put, and stood committed to a Committee of the whole House in respect of clauses 7 to 18, 41 to 44, 65 to 81, 129, 132 to 136 and 144 to 154 and schedules 2, 3, 11 to 14 and 18 to 22, and to a Public Bill Committee in respect of the remainder (Standing Order No. 80B and Order, 11 April); to be printed (Bill 1) with explanatory notes (Bill 1-EN).

INVESTIGATORY POWERS BILL

Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Order No. 80A)

Secretary Theresa May, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Philip Hammond, Secretary Michael Fallon, Secretary David Mundell, Secretary Theresa Villiers, the Attorney General, Robert Buckland and Mr John Hayes, presented a Bill to make provision about the interception of communications, equipment interference and the acquisition and retention of communications

data, bulk personal datasets and other information; to make provision about the treatment of material held as a result of such interception, equipment interference or acquisition or retention; to establish the Investigatory Powers Commissioner and other Judicial Commissioners and make provision about them and other oversight arrangements; to make further provision about investigatory powers and national security; to amend sections 3 and 5 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First and Second time without Question put (Standing Order No. 80A and Order, 15 March); to be considered tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 2) with explanatory notes (Bill 2-EN).

POLICING AND CRIME BILL

Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Order No. 80A)

Secretary Theresa May, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Michael Gove, Secretary Jeremy Hunt, Secretary Greg Clark, the Attorney General and Mike Penning, presented a Bill to make provision for collaboration between the emergency services; to make provision about the handling of police complaints and other matters relating to police conduct and to make further provision about the Independent Police Complaints Commission; to make provision for super-complaints about policing; to make provision for the investigation of concerns about policing raised by whistle-blowers; to make provision about police discipline; to make provision about police inspection; to make provision about the powers of police civilian staff and police volunteers; to remove the powers of the police to appoint traffic wardens; to enable provision to be made to alter police ranks; to make provision about the Police Federation; to make provision in connection with the replacement of the Association of Chief Police Officers with the National Police Chiefs' Council; to make provision about the system for bail after arrest but before charge; to make provision to enable greater use of modern technology at police stations; to make other amendments to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; to amend the powers of the police under the Mental Health Act 1983; to extend the powers of the police in relation to maritime enforcement; to make provision about deputy police and crime commissioners; to make provision to enable changes to the names of police areas; to make provision about the regulation of firearms; to make provision about the licensing of alcohol; to make provision about the implementation and enforcement of financial sanctions; to amend the Police Act 1996 to make further provision about police collaboration; to make provision about the powers of the National Crime Agency; to make provision for requiring arrested persons to provide details of nationality; to make provision for requiring defendants in criminal proceedings to provide details of nationality and other information; to make provision to combat the sexual exploitation of children; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First and Second time without Question put (Standing Order No. 80A and Order, 7 March); to be further considered tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 3) with explanatory notes (Bill 3-EN).

Debate on the Address

[2ND DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 18 May).

Question again proposed,

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

Most Gracious Sovereign,

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

Transport and Local Infrastructure

11.37 am

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): With permission, before I introduce the debate I would like to make a brief statement about the loss of EgyptAir flight MS804. The aircraft, an Airbus 320, carrying 56 passengers and 10 members of crew between Paris and Cairo, disappeared from radar at approximately 1.30 am UK time, over the waters of the eastern Mediterranean. We understand that one of the passengers on board is a UK national and that consular staff are in contact with the family and are providing support. I know that the House will want to join me in saying that our thoughts are with the family and friends of all those on board. The Government are in touch with the Egyptian and French authorities and have offered full assistance. The air accidents investigation branch has offered to assist with the investigation in any way it can.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): As chairman of the all-party Egypt group, I thank my right hon. Friend for the measures that he is seeking to take and associate myself and the group with the condolences that he has expressed. Will the Government seek to discuss with the French authorities in particular whether they are satisfied that the measures that they are taking to screen passengers and luggage at Paris meet the requirements that we in the United Kingdom feel are necessary, bearing in mind that, I believe, a number of people airside in Paris have had their authorisation revoked because of their association with Islamic extremism?

Mr McLoughlin: It is far too early to make any assumptions about what has happened, but of course we will want to look at all the issues and discuss them with the French authorities and others. I can assure my hon. Friend that we will take that further forward.

It is a pleasure to open this debate on Her Majesty's Gracious Speech. I very much welcome the opportunity to talk about our plans for transport and infrastructure. Yesterday's speech was all about building a stronger, more resilient, more modern economy that provides security for all people and opportunity at every stage of life—a country fit for the future, no matter the challenges it faces. If we have learned anything from the past decade, it is that we need to be better prepared and more responsible during the times of plenty so that we can weather the more difficult times.

In the previous Parliament, we had to take some tough economic decisions, but they were the right economic decisions. We earned a hard-fought recovery from recession and the financial crisis. In 2014, Britain was the fastest growing major advanced economy in the world. In 2015, we were the second fastest growing after the United States. In 2016, the employment rate has hit yet another record high. More families are benefiting from the security of regular wages, and unemployment has fallen once again. The deficit is down by two thirds as a share of GDP on 2010, and the Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast that it will be eliminated by 2019-20. That recovery is still going on today, and with the global economy slowing, it is even more vital that we stick to our long-term economic plan.

However, we do not just need a responsible fiscal strategy; we also need to invest for Britain's future to create the capacity and space we need to grow. For decades, we have been slipping down the global infrastructure league tables. To take an example from recent history, let me pluck two years out of thin air—say, between 1997 and 2010. In those 13 years that I take at random, Britain slipped from seventh to 33rd in the world infrastructure league tables. As a result, we watched our roads grow increasingly congested, our railways become overcrowded, and our town centres choke with traffic. If we cannot move people or goods efficiently from one place to another, how can we expect businesses to invest in Britain? Building the infrastructure that Britain needs to compete is one of the defining political challenges of the age, so we have spent the past six years in government turning things around.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr McLoughlin: I could take a lesson from the Leader of the Opposition from yesterday, but I hope my speech will not be quite as bad as that, so I certainly give way to my hon. Friend.

Mark Spencer: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. Does he recognise that one of the barriers to gaining employment is sometimes the infrastructure needed to get from where one lives to where one wants to work? In that vein, does he recall standing on the platform at the former Edwinstowe railway station, and will he bring forward plans to fund the extension of the Robin Hood line in the very near future?

Mr McLoughlin: I well remember visiting my hon. Friend's constituency with him just over 12 months ago, although I cannot remember what was happening at the time. I also well remember the fantastic result that he had at the subsequent general election and the way in which he has always pushed for more infrastructure in his area. I want us to work with him, the local authority and the local enterprise partnership to see what other systems of transport we can provide. I have to say that Nottingham has not done too badly in relation to infrastructure investment. We have seen a huge amount of investment in the new station and the dualling of the A457—[*Interruption*]*—*and I am very grateful that the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) was able to join me for its opening. [*Interruption.*] She says, "Thanks to a Labour county council." Actually,

[Mr McLoughlin]

those plans were progressed by a Conservative county council when it was in office and had not been progressed before at all, as she well knows.

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): I suspect that the Secretary of State knows exactly what I am going to raise with him. He picked the years of 1997 to 2010 at random, and I will go along the same vein. In '97, my predecessor said that the Mottram-Tintwistle bypass would definitely get built; in 2010, there was still no spade in the ground. We promised before the last election that we would build the Mottram relief road and the Glossop spur, and we are looking at extending that to deal with the Mottram and Tintwistle problem. Can he confirm to me and my residents that we are still determined to press on with that as fast as possible? We talk about growing the economy and growing jobs, and that project is vital for Glossop and the surrounding area.

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is my parliamentary neighbour: our constituencies share a border. He has made his case and I am pleased to confirm our road investment strategy, which reflects the points he has made. In fact, we want to go further. We have commissioned a report by Colin Matthews on better connectivity between Manchester and Sheffield, which would have a huge beneficial effect for my hon. Friend's constituency.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr McLoughlin: I am slightly worried about the amount of time I am going to take and the number of Members who are seeking to intervene on me, but I cannot resist the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley).

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I hope that the Secretary of State will comment on the woeful transport situation in Salford in my constituency. There are no plans to improve our key road network and the three motorways in my constituency, or for any substantial upgrades to our rail services through Eccles, Walkden and Patricroft. Our bus services are completely woeful. Traffic in Salford has increased by 3.6%—three times the Greater Manchester average. On Monday I will meet the Royal Horticultural Society to discuss the building of its fifth garden, which will bring 1 million visitors to Salford every year. How are they going to be brought in?

Mr McLoughlin: I will come on to say more about the work we are doing on road infrastructure and devolution to local authorities. Salford should be in a strong position to take advantage of some of those measures.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): May I also pick two years out of thin air, namely 2010 to 2020, which will mark a decade of absolutely zero investment in the M56 in Chester? The Government are refusing not only to upgrade it to a smart motorway, but to install police and Highways Agency cameras so that we may know what the problems are. What can my constituents look forward to in respect of the M56 upgrade?

Mr McLoughlin: I join the hon. Gentleman in saying that we need to spend more money on infrastructure, but we also have to make sure that we spend it properly and in a planned manner. As well as the extra investment—I will talk more about that—we will also look at those areas that we have not been able to cover, provided that we get the other sides of the economy in good order.

In the past six years, we have turned things around as far as infrastructure is concerned. We have climbed up the global infrastructure investment league table and are now in the top 10, ahead of France, Japan and Germany. Action is under way, with new wider roads, new faster trains and better urban transport. In the south-west there is the widening of the A30 and the A303, and there are brand new trains on order. In the north-west, Manchester Victoria station has been transformed, there are electric trains on the northern hub and motorways have been widened. In East Anglia, the A11 has opened and the Norwich northern distributor road is under construction. We are finally taking action on the A47, which is of great interest to my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning, who will wind up the debate, and on the A14. In the midlands, there has been a transformation at Birmingham New Street station, and the M1 has been partly converted to four-lane running. I could go on and mention Crossrail in London and other action right around the country, but time will not allow me to continue reciting my list of improvements.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for mentioning the south-west. The key issues for us are ensuring that we have an alternative railway line to that down to Dawlish and getting the dualling of the A303 so that we can have better transport and therefore deliver productivity, which is lamentable at present.

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The Labour party manifesto said that it would cancel some of our road programmes in the south-west. It mentioned them specifically and we will remind Labour of that time and again.

A Treasury report last year revealed that more than £400 billion-worth of infrastructure work is planned across the country. The biggest slice of that is for transport. Overall, transport infrastructure spending will rise by 50% during this Parliament. That means that we can invest £15 billion to maintain and improve our roads—the largest figure for a generation. There will be £6 billion for local highways maintenance, which is double the spending of the last Labour Government. We are also giving local authorities a multi-year funding settlement for the first time ever, with an additional £250 million to address local potholes.

We can contrast that with the last Labour Government's record. Between 2001 and 2010, just 574 lane miles were added to our motorways; we are adding more than 1,300 miles. Labour electrified only 10 miles of rails of railway track; we have already electrified five times that amount, and anybody who goes on the Great Western line can see that there are many more to come very soon.

We are delivering the most ambitious rail modernisation programme since the Victorian era—a £40 billion investment. We have Crossrail, Thameslink, electrification and the intercity express programme. Hitachi—a company

that has now moved its global headquarters to Britain—is building new carriages in new factories in the north-east, opened by the Prime Minister. Of course, there is High Speed 2, for which construction will start next year. This is a new start for infrastructure that will make Britain one of the leading transport investors.

The Gracious Speech also includes legislation to back the National Infrastructure Commission, whose influence is already being felt. Following its recommendations, we have invested an extra £300 million to improve northern transport connectivity, on top of the record £13 billion already committed across the north. We have given the green light to High Speed 3 between Leeds and Manchester and allocated an extra £80 million to help fund the development of Crossrail 2.

I am pleased to say that by the end of this Parliament, Crossrail 1—or, as we can now call it, the Elizabeth line—will be operating. It is the most significant investment in transport in London for many a generation, and it will make a welcome addition to the capital's infrastructure.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am a bit worried about Sheffield's position in that list of schemes. The Secretary of State referred to HS3 as going from Manchester to Leeds, not connecting to Sheffield. Has that connection disappeared off the Government's radar? Will he confirm that there is no truth in the stories that consideration is being given to abandoning the HS2 station in Sheffield, and that wherever that station might be, there will be one? Are we going to get HS3 as well?

Mr McLoughlin: I am coming on to HS2, and if the hon. Gentleman does not feel that I have answered his question after that, I will give way to him a little later. I hope he will be reassured by what I am about to say.

What I have described adds up to an ambitious pipeline of schemes that will not only free up capacity, boost freight and improve travel but help us to attract jobs, rebalance the economy and make us a more prosperous country. Of course, there will be disruption and inconvenience while some of that is happening, but when the work is done we will get the benefits, as at Reading station, the new Wakefield station or Nottingham station—infrastructure that will prepare Britain for the future.

That is what is behind the modern transport Bill, which will pave the way for the technologies and transport of tomorrow. We are already developing the charging infrastructure for electric and hybrid vehicles. Driverless cars and commercial space flights may seem like science fiction to some, but the economic potential of those new technologies is vast, and we are determined that Britain will benefit by helping to lead their development. Driverless cars will come under new legislation so that they can be insured under ordinary policies. The new laws will help autonomous and driverless vehicles become a real option for private buyers and fleets. The UK is already established as one of the best places in the world to research and develop those vehicles, just as we are leading the way on real-world testing to ensure that cars meet emissions standards, to clean up the air quality in our cities. Through the Bill we will strengthen our position as a leader in the intelligent mobility

sector, which is growing by an estimated 16% a year and which some experts have said could be worth up to £900 billion worldwide by 2020.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Despite the initial gloom that descended on me when I heard my right hon. Friend mention HS2, may I say how delighted I am to hear about the growth in autonomous drive technology? I congratulate him and the Government on promoting it, because there is no question but that the United Kingdom leads the way in that area, working alongside Japan. Autonomous drive will potentially increase the density of traffic on our motorways fourfold, so let us stick with it. I will resist the temptation to say that we would not need HS2 if we had autonomous drive cars—that would be the wrong thing to say, I think.

Mr McLoughlin: Whenever my hon. Friend intervenes I am never sure whether I regard it as helpful or not—I think on that one the jury is still out.

The Bill will also allow for the construction of the first commercial spaceport. A full range of viable options have been put forward, and we support those bids. The Bill will create the right framework for the market to select what the best location will be. We will legislate to encourage British entrepreneurs to make the most of the commercial opportunities of space. That will form part of the Government's wider support for the UK space sector, and is aimed at raising revenues from almost £12 billion to £40 billion by 2030—around 10% of the global space economy.

We are also preparing for HS2, which is the biggest infrastructure scheme that this country has seen for a generation. The transformation of rail travel across Britain will free up capacity on the rest of the network, and rebalance our economy and economic geography. Before a single track has been laid, the HS2 factor is already having an impact. Blue-chip companies such as Burberry have chosen to move to Leeds, and HSBC has relocated its retail banking headquarters from London to Birmingham, citing HS2 as a significant factor in that decision. We have seen ambitious regeneration plans around places such as Curzon Street in Birmingham and Old Oak Common. Cities such as Leeds, Manchester, Crewe and Sheffield are preparing for phase 2.

Michael Fabricant: Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mr McLoughlin: Will this be helpful or not?

Michael Fabricant: My right hon. Friend mentioned Curzon Street, and given that I fear there will be HS2, may I put down a marker? He will know that there is a cross-city line from Lichfield Trent Valley to Redditch. If HS2 eventually links up directly with the continent and does not go via St Pancras, it would be hugely advantageous if there were a halt at Curzon Street on the cross-city line, because that rail line runs immediately adjacent to the HS2 terminus.

Mr McLoughlin: Although my hon. Friend was against HS2, I am pleased that he is already thinking about how it can benefit his area and region. I join him in his partial conversion, and I will take that as a helpful intervention.

[Mr McLoughlin]

HS2 means that businesses will be able to access new markets, drawing their employees from much wider catchment areas, and perhaps for the first time they will consider moving offices away from London. When HS2 construction begins next year, we will be building something much bigger than a new railway; we will be investing in the economic prosperity of the next half century or more, training a new generation of engineers, developing new skills for a new generation of apprentices, and rebalancing growth that for far too long has been concentrated in London and the south-east.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I am delighted to hear the right hon. Gentleman speak of such great plans for England, but what progress has he made with electrification to my constituency of Swansea East?

Mr McLoughlin: I am glad to say that I have made a lot more progress than was made in 13 years of the last Labour Government. To get to Swansea we must first get to Cardiff. We will get to Cardiff, and then we will get to Swansea, as has been promised—that work is on the way. The hon. Lady will travel on the Great Western line, and she will have seen all the work that has been going on. She will be a regular traveller through Reading, and she will have seen where £800 million has been spent on that scheme. We are doing a fair job in ensuring that her constituents, and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies), who has often made the case for electrification to Swansea, will benefit from that.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr McLoughlin: I cannot resist.

Lilian Greenwood: Would the Transport Secretary like to confirm that electrification of the Great Western main line was set out by a former Transport Secretary in 2009, and will he also confirm exactly how delayed and over budget it is?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Lady says that electrification was set out in 2009. It might have been. [HON. MEMBERS: "It was!"] One has to wonder why the Labour Government waited 12 years, until they knew they were about to lose office—in 2010—before coming out with plans. We are the ones who have carried them though. Yes, the costs have gone up—I very much regret that—but overall it is still a worthwhile project. Had it been started 15 or 20 years ago, it would not be costing what it is today. Anybody can lay out plans. In fact, Labour is sometimes very good at it, but it always fails on delivery and leaves it to us.

As I said, we will be firing up the north and the midlands to take advantage of this transformational project. After overwhelming support in the House, the Bill has now moved to another place, and I look forward to the Lords Select Committee. I am a strong supporter of remaining in the EU, but I am glad that I will no longer be able to get a high-speed train only from London to Paris or Brussels but that soon they will run to Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield. No matter how big the scheme, it is now vital for Britain's

national infrastructure. We will always remember that the vast majority of journeys are local, which means that local transport and infrastructure are no less crucial to preparing Britain for the future. In that regard, we back safer routes for more cycling and better buses.

We are devolving power to our cities and regions to give communities a much bigger stake in local planning. Transport is just one aspect of that. As we heard yesterday, the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill will give communities a much stronger voice and make the local planning process clearer, easier and quicker so as to deliver local infrastructure and support our ambition to build 1 million new homes, while protecting the areas we value the most, such as the green belt. Our reforms have already resulted in councils granting planning applications for more than 250,000 homes in the past year.

But our plans go much further. We want to become a country where everybody who works hard can have their own home, so the Gracious Speech also featured the local jobs and growth Bill, which will allow local authorities to retain 100% of local taxes to spend on local services by the end of the Parliament. That will be worth an extra £13 billion from business rates. Councils have called for more fiscal autonomy; now they are getting it—a real commitment from central Government, real devolution and real self-sufficiency for regions across England. It is arguably the biggest change to local government finance for a generation. The Bill will give authorities the power to cut business rates, boost enterprise and grow their local economies. As announced in the Budget, we will pilot the new system in Greater Manchester and Liverpool and increase the share retained in London.

It is little wonder that Labour Members are giving up on opposition and seeking new roles in life. I offer the shadow Home Secretary my best wishes for his mayoral nomination bid. He obviously does not think he is going to be Home Secretary after the next general election, and nor do I.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I am proud of this Conservative majority Government for looking at whole issues when it comes to serving our local communities, such as on infrastructure and business rates retention. Where we have no local plans, the Government are giving communities an opportunity to intervene and draw more up. Almost 50% of commuting in my area is out of Eastleigh, and standing traffic and air pollution are a big problem.

Mr McLoughlin: I know how important transport infrastructure and connectivity are in my hon. Friend's constituency—we have discussed them many times—and I hope that our transport policies, such as those I have set out today, will help bring about some of the changes she wants.

Yesterday illustrated just how we are devolving power for local transport services. The bus services Bill will provide new powers for local authorities to improve bus services and increase passenger numbers. It will deliver for passengers, local authorities and bus companies, all working in partnership together to improve services. We will replace the disastrous quality contract scheme pioneered when Labour was in office—a failed theory that has never been successfully applied over the past 16 years.

Stronger partnerships will allow local authorities to agree a new set of standards for bus services, including branding, ticketing and how often buses run. Passengers want to know when their next bus is going to turn up and how much it is going to cost, so the Bill will mandate the release of fares, punctuality, routes and real-time bus location information. This will help the development of more transport apps, as it has already done in London, right across the country. There will be new journey planners and other innovative products to help passengers get the most out of their buses. This is about delivering for customers and empowering local communities.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con) *rose*—

Mr McLoughlin: I give way, I hope for the last time.

Ben Howlett: My right hon. Friend is incredibly generous in giving way. Will he confirm that the buses Bill will enable communities in devolved areas such as mine in the west of England to integrate smartcard ticketing, which will end up encouraging more people to use buses for less?

Mr McLoughlin: I certainly want to see more use of smart ticketing, and I think the bus companies are now addressing the issue. There will be criteria on whether local authorities can apply for the franchising. We will need to see whether my hon. Friend's area lives up to those priorities.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr McLoughlin: Is it about a train that runs only once a week?

Andrew Gwynne: In one direction only! I would also quite like to have a train service that goes into Manchester, but my question is about smart ticketing. Will the right hon. Gentleman knock some common sense into the transport planners who are trying to reinvent the wheel? We have had a bit of a farce in Greater Manchester, where many millions of pounds have been spent on trying to develop the technology of the “get me there” card, when we all already have some technology for that in our own pockets. It is called a contactless card. Why do we have to reinvent the wheel? Why can we not just use the technology that exists?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman talks about the contactless card, and I agree with him that there are such new technologies. That is a fairly new technology, and people in London see it used regularly nowadays. These are the areas on which we should be moving further forward, and I hope we will be able to make that happen.

This is all about delivering for customers and empowering local communities. New powers to franchise services will be available to combined authorities with directly elected mayors, just as they are in London, and private operators will be able to compete through the franchising system. Together, these measures demonstrate the Government's ambition to deliver transport that helps the public to get around and get about.

The coalition Government and this one nation Conservative Government have a record to be proud of: investment up; projects under way; journeys getting easier; backing growth, jobs and new technology; helping local people get the homes and the infrastructure they need; striking a fairer deal for local government; giving devolution to local regions; and making Britain a leader. A stronger economy is at the heart of the Gracious Speech, and transport infrastructure is playing its part.

12.8 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I echo the sentiments of the Transport Secretary on the loss of air flight MS804 to Egypt. Our thoughts are with the family and friends of the passengers and crew while we await the outcome of the investigations that are now under way.

Although we are not debating the Queen's Speech that I would have wanted, it is fitting to start these debates on transport. The challenges facing this country's transport networks are profound, and there are some important cross-party points of agreement for meeting them. I welcome the Transport Secretary to his place, but I must point out that his speech was a timely reminder of the need for Ministers to mind the gap between their rhetoric and reality.

The Secretary of State said that the Government were delivering investment, but let us look at the real Conservative record. We see bus and rail fares up by a quarter, billions cancelled from road investment schemes, new projects under threat, the hard shoulder stripped from the motorways, the wheels falling off the “cycling revolution”, a £12 billion maintenance backlog on our local roads, and rail punctuality at its worst for a decade—and, of course, the Government promised a northern powerhouse but inflicted a northern power cut instead.

That said, we welcome the Government's stated intention to introduce new local transport powers, extending to the entire country the ability to introduce the successful models employed in the capital. I am sure that the whole House will want to extend its congratulations to Sadiq Khan, the former Member of Parliament for Tooting, who is now the Labour Mayor of London. It is, perhaps, a little-known fact that the new Mayor is the son of a bus driver. The proposal in the bus services Bill to extend London-style bus powers to the rest of the country is long overdue, and it is possibly no coincidence that the Transport Secretary did not even mention buses until 27 minutes into his speech. These plans could, of course, have been made in the last Parliament, but Ministers consistently opposed any proposals for the tendering of bus services to reverse the disastrous consequences of the Transport Act 1985.

Mr McLoughlin: I join the hon. Lady in congratulating Sadiq Khan on his election. May I ask whether she agrees with what he said in 2009, when he was a Transport Minister? He said then:

“one reason we are able to invest record sums in our railway service is the revenues that the franchises bring in and the premiums that they pay”.—[*Official Report*, 1 July 2009; Vol. 495, c. 430.]

Lilian Greenwood: I was very pleased that there was record investment in our railways under the last Labour Government. There are so many things that the Transport

[Lilian Greenwood]

Secretary forgets to talk about. Every week I travel up to the midlands on the midland main line via St Pancras railway station; it has been transformed, and was transformed under a Labour Government, but he never mentions that.

I welcome the Transport Secretary's damascene conversion to the cause of bus regulation, which might be described as a screeching U-turn. However, as always with this Government, the devil will be in the detail. We have yet to see the text of the bus services Bill, and it is a shame that it was not published in time for today's debate. I remind Conservative Members that last year's Queen's Speech also promised a buses Bill. Madam Deputy Speaker, you wait five years for a Conservative Queen's Speech that mentions buses, and then two come along at once—even if they are running late. We will subject the Bill to close scrutiny. It is vital for it to provide a legal framework that protects local authorities from eye-watering compensation claims, and to safeguard working conditions.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend has mentioned local authorities. If she listened carefully to the Queen's Speech, she will know that Her Majesty said that the powers in the buses Bill would be extended only to parts of England with directly elected mayors. Does she think that the powers in the Bill, which we expect to be published soon, should extend to all parts of England, whether or not they have mayoral models?

Lilian Greenwood: The Bill must address the decline in rural bus services, which have suffered some of the worst cuts and highest fare rises in the country, but, as my hon. Friend says, we also need to ensure that those powers are available to any area that wants them. I welcome the concession the Transport Secretary has made. According to the Queen's Speech briefing, which was published yesterday, the Bill will allow communities without directly elected mayors to apply for contracting powers. It is, however, unclear why those powers should remain in the gift of the Department. Both the Transport Secretary and I represent areas that have, so far, not agreed a devolution deal. Perhaps the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Mr McLoughlin) can explain why those powers are good enough for Manchester, but might not be good enough for Matlock.

The Queen's Speech also contained the announcement of what the Government call their modern transport Bill, although, given that the Minister of State—who, sadly, is not present today—drives a 126-year-old car and is a noted steam engine enthusiast, perhaps we should check their definition of “modern transport”.

As ever, the Government's announcement is long on statements of intent, but short on details. The Queen's Speech briefing said that the law on drones would be reformed, but, in answers to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), the Government have consistently said that the EU is leading in the area. It is unacceptable that Ministers seem to be waiting for a serious drone strike to occur before taking action: it is vital that we do not wait for an accident to happen.

Electric cars will play a crucial role in driving down emissions, but we are playing catch-up, because the Government failed to deliver their promise in the coalition

agreement to establish a national charging network. We welcome the development of personal autonomous vehicles. They could prove to be a boon for our car manufacturing industry, and I know that they are eagerly anticipated by many disabled people. However, given that insurance premiums have risen by 20% over the last year, the Government's proposal to insure driverless cars on the same basis as existing policies may not offer much reassurance to prospective buyers. That said, the focus on driverless cars is, perhaps, understandable, given the Government's tendency to run on autopilot.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): As my hon. Friend is talking about developments in technology, may I ask whether she agrees that the bus services Bill provides an opportunity for all new buses to be made accessible to people with sight loss? Two million people would greatly appreciate talking buses, with “next stop” and “final destination” announcements.

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the lack of accessibility on buses. A number of London buses provide audio-visual announcements, but there are very few examples outside London, and that should be addressed.

The Minister of State has said that the United Kingdom should adopt a “light touch” approach to driverless car development, but we need to ensure that the risks have been fully analysed. It is important that Ministers do not move—to coin a phrase—too far and too fast. It should also be said, however, that that is just about the only area in which the Government could be accused of acting too quickly.

Michael Fabricant: Does the hon. Lady not accept that Toyota, Nissan, Mercedes and BMW have all welcomed the Government's initiatives to ensure that driverless, or autonomous, cars are tested on British roads? They see Britain as a leader.

Lilian Greenwood: As I have said, I believe that the proposal offers a great opportunity to our excellent automotive industry. However, we need to be aware of potential technological difficulties, and of the safety implications.

The Transport Secretary referred to supporting the growing space industry by constructing the UK's first space port. I should say, in fairness to the right hon. Gentleman, that it is impressive that he can put a rocket into space, although he cannot fix our pothole-ridden roads.

We also need to consider the Bills that were not announced yesterday. The Department has had two years in which to respond to the Law Commission's report on taxis and private hire vehicles. The rise of Uber and other app-based services makes the need for reform all the more urgent. During yesterday's debate, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) said that personal safety on transport services was women's highest priority, and there can be no excuse for the delay in reforming licensing and regulation in that regard.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend will know that, on 4 May, I led an Adjournment debate on precisely that issue. Is she as concerned as I am that some taxi licensing authorities are effectively handing out licences to taxi drivers throughout the country who have been legitimately refused licences by their own local authorities?

Lilian Greenwood: As my hon. Friend will know, there are real concerns about taxi licensing and regulation, which were carefully addressed in the Law Commission's report. That is why it is so disappointing that the Government have yet to respond properly to the report, and to take action.

Ministers have also had nearly three years in which to respond to the Law Commission's recommendations on reforming level crossings, which are the single greatest cause of risk on the railways. In the Department's level crossing reform action plan—I will refrain from using its acronym—legislation was planned for this year, but that, too, failed to make the Queen's Speech. It is extremely disappointing that such safety-critical legislation is not being treated as a priority by the Government.

Turning to the wider Conservative record on transport, time and time again promises are broken, investment is delayed and the interests of passengers and road users are not put first. Of course, there was a line to please the Chancellor in the Queen's Speech, which was that the "Government will continue to support the development of a Northern Powerhouse."

We can tell that the Chancellor is a wallpaper salesman—these days, he spends most of his time papering over the cracks.

Let us look at the Government's real record on transport in the north. Rail spending in the north-west has fallen from £97 to £93 per head. In the north-east, it has fallen from £59 to £52 per head—less than half the national average. Funding for bus services in Yorkshire and Humber is down 31%. Traffic police numbers have fallen by over 10% across the north. Shamefully, Ministers hiked rail fares on northern commuter routes by up to 162%. They also allowed modern trans-Pennine trains to be transferred from the north to the south, costing taxpayers £20 million.

The Transport Secretary initially wanted to call his railway pledges the "rail investment plan", until a civil servant pointed out that that would be shortened to RIP. Delays to electrification were shamefully covered up before the election and confessed to only once the ballot boxes had closed.

There are real concerns that promised road investment could suffer the same fate. Highways England has publicly discussed

"Challenges on the current RIS"—
the road investment strategy—

"construction programme, including the level of uncertainty about projects due to begin in the final year and the potential knock on effect on funding for RIS2".

Those plans include the trans-Pennine road tunnel and spending on the existing A66 and A69 trans-Pennine links and the M60. It is clear that we cannot trust the Tories on roads, rail or local transport.

Northern cities are succeeding under Labour leadership despite the Government.

Mr Betts: There are 200 workers in Sheffield who will have listened with incredulity when the Transport Secretary said that HS2—he said it will benefit Sheffield, and I clearly hope it does—should be a reason for companies to look at transferring jobs out of London to northern cities. Yet, in a reversal of that process, the Business Secretary is currently transferring 200 jobs from Sheffield down to London—down the midland main line instead

of back up the HS2 line. How will workers in Sheffield feel about the complete contradiction between the Transport Secretary and his colleague in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills?

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, and it is no surprise that people in the city of Sheffield reject this Government completely.

The north was a powerhouse long before the Chancellor arrived, and it will be a powerhouse long after he has gone. On HS2, the Government's delivery has been anything other than high speed. A decision on the route of phase 2 has been delayed by two years. I would like to remind Ministers of a Conservative party press release issued in Yorkshire on 21 April 2015. They should not worry—it is not about campaign bus expenses. No questions from local media were allowed, and it is not difficult to see why. The press release said:

"Phase Two of HS2 will also start construction from the northern ends, with the Leeds to Sheffield Meadowhall section made a priority to open even before the line as a whole opens."

Those plans to build HS2 from the north have already been dropped—if they ever existed. Once again, we are faced with a Conservative election promise that has been broken.

Over the last fortnight, it has been reported that phase 2 is under review and that prominent critics of HS2 have been invited into the Treasury to set out the case against the project. Stations at Sheffield and Manchester airport could also be dropped, along with the Handsacre link—which would allow high-speed trains to run to Stoke and Stafford—even though the Secretary of State has given specific assurances in the House on the link's future.

There are specific questions that the Government must still answer. If those reports have no basis, why did the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise say on Sunday:

"We need to...sort this out or Sheffield might miss"

out on HS2? Has what the Government call the "appropriate third-party funding contribution", which the Transport Secretary said Manchester Airport station was dependent on, been agreed?

Two months ago, the House voted overwhelmingly in favour of HS2 on a specific understanding of the project. Of course costs must be kept under control, but it would be totally unacceptable if the plans for high-speed rail in the midlands and the north were downgraded by some unaccountable and secretive review.

Let us not forget the Government's record—if it can be called that—on aviation. In 2009 the Prime Minister famously said:

"The third runway at Heathrow is not going ahead, no ifs, no buts."

By last July, that had morphed into:

"The guarantee that I can give...is that a decision will be made by the end of the year."—[*Official Report*, 1 July 2015; Vol. 597, c. 1473.]

It is difficult to take the latest pledge to report by this summer seriously, but perhaps the Government will surprise us.

While Ministers are failing to deliver on national transport schemes, local services are being severely squeezed. More than 2,400 bus routes have been downgraded or cut altogether. The Rail Minister said at Christmas:

"Our plan for passengers is improving journeys for everyone",

[Lilian Greenwood]

but the reality is that commuters are being priced off buses and trains, and some season tickets cost £2,000 more than in 2010. Punctuality is at its worst in a decade—worse than when the network was still recovering from the Hatfield disaster. Ministers are considering further cuts to Network Rail's maintenance plans.

The pothole crisis on local roads gets worse by the day, after local upkeep budgets fell by 27% in real terms. Even on walking and cycling—an area where the Prime Minister has a personal interest—I am worried that Ministers might have misinterpreted their brief. That can be the only explanation for publishing a cycling and walking investment strategy that is so utterly pedestrian. Targets for increasing walking journeys have been inexplicably dropped. I hope the Secretary of State will take advantage of national walking month to reverse that decision.

A year ago the Prime Minister said it was his “aim to increase spending” on cycling further, to £10 a head. However, analysis of spending figures obtained by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) shows that Government funding for cycling is due to fall to just 72p per head outside London. It is clear that the Government have produced a cycling and walking investment strategy with no investment, and the promise to raise spending on cycling has been broken.

Mr McLoughlin: One of the problems of going first and not being able to follow is that the hon. Lady is asking a number of questions that I am unable to answer. However, I find it rather odd that she talks about capital investment, when David Miliband said in the 2010 general election:

“we're going to halve the share of national income going to capital spending”—

that was on Radio 5 Live in July 2010. That was what the Labour party's plans were. Our plans have been to massively increase investment in public transport and transport across the piece.

Lilian Greenwood: Would it not make a change if the Secretary of State actually took some responsibility in this place for the past six years and for the Government's failings?

Across the country, the Government are failing to deliver the investment we need and to support local, sustainable transport. However, there can be no doubt that the situation would be even worse if we left the European Union. We are on the verge of making a decision that will affect countless generations. Europe has made real improvements to the quality of journeys in the UK and, from it, to the continent and beyond.

Although we need urgently to move to real-world testing, overall emissions from new vehicles have been reduced by up to 95% in the last few years alone, thanks to European standards. The EU is also a vital source of funding for national and local projects. Whether it is Crossrail, new intercity express programme trains or major ports upgrades, there is often European funding behind the transport improvements we desperately need.

If we voted to leave, airlines would lose their right to access the American market, spelling chaos for jobs in the aviation industry. Some of our largest car and train manufacturers have made it clear that inward investment and jobs depend on access to the single market.

The transport case for staying in the EU is overwhelming, as is the case in other policy areas. I hope that when we plan transport services over the coming decades, we do so on the basis of a renewed mandate for our membership of the European Union.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg), I want to point out that there are 18 Members wishing to speak in this debate. That works out to roughly 10 minutes each, so if everybody takes about 10 minutes, everybody will get in. That, of course, excludes the SNP spokesperson.

12.30 pm

William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): It is a pleasure to rise in support of the Humble Address in response to Her Majesty's most Gracious Speech. The programme of government for the upcoming Session contains many welcome measures. My constituents will particularly welcome the universal service obligation for internet providers, to be brought in through the digital economy Bill, which will give every UK household the legal right to an affordable, fast broadband connection, with minimum guaranteed connection speeds. That is something for which I have campaigned in my constituency for some years, and it formed one of my pledges to residents at the general election. The more rural areas of my constituency, including Mellor, Strines and Marple Bridge, will, I hope, particularly welcome the policy, because many of those who live there have had to endure second-rate internet connection services for far too long.

I am pleased that the introduction of the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill will provide an opportunity to give local communities more power to control and shape their own areas. As vice chair of the all-party group for civic societies, I am proud of the diligent work undertaken by members of civic societies across the country, including the one in Marple, of which I am a member. Let me be clear. Neighbourhood planning is not about nimbysism. We are not against development; indeed, I praise Her Majesty's Government's ambition for house building. Neighbourhood planning is about working constructively with communities, determining sites for appropriate development and providing the infrastructure necessary to make it viable. Neighbourhood planning is a way to bring communities on board with developers and therefore get more built.

A case in point is Marple's neighbourhood forum, which was recently established in order to develop a neighbourhood plan. I am sure that other hon. Members will have similar experiences in their constituencies. Neighbourhood planning is a way of bringing about collaboration, but such plans need to be assured of legal weight. Although I regret that the Government were unable to accept the amendment from the Lords to the Housing and Planning Act 2016 on the community right of appeal—an amendment with which many Conservative Members had sympathy—I hope that the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill will go much of the way to achieving the same aim.

It will come as no surprise that I welcome the education Bill, and I welcome the Government's goal of continuing to increase the number and quality of academy schools

in the coming years. Importantly, however, I welcome the fact that that will no longer be done on a compulsory basis, as was proposed previously, following a re-think from the Government. I extend my thanks to the Secretary of State for Education for taking the time to listen to my genuine concerns, and those of other colleagues, about the academies programme, and for that important change of tack. I look forward to working with her and others to progress the Bill. It also includes the vital new national funding formula for schools, which will end the entrenched disparities in school funding and bring about fairness for all pupils.

On a related note, I was pleased to hear that measures will be introduced to strengthen social services for children in care, and to increase the number and speed of adoptions. I say gently that in desiring greater speed, we should be careful not to sacrifice the suitability of placements. As the intention of adoptions is to find permanent, stable and loving homes for children, a rushed process could lead to harm in the long term if the system becomes overly streamlined.

The children and social work Bill will improve social work provision through better training and standards for social workers. It will mean that children leaving care will be made aware of the ongoing services that they are entitled to, which include access to a personal adviser until the age of 25. That is particularly welcome, only weeks after a striking report by the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change on the stark disparities in mental healthcare provision for looked-after children.

Mental health problems are also particularly prevalent among the prison population, and mental health care and services for prisoners are not up to the standard they should be. I hope that the Government will put a particular focus on improving that as they work to build new reforming prisons.

The Queen's Speech contained welcome plans to introduce the NHS overseas visitors charging Bill, under which overseas visitors and migrants will be charged for using NHS services to which they are not entitled. Tighter residency rules will mean that fewer visitors from the EU and the EEA will be able to access free healthcare. In the NHS, we have one of the greatest and most envied healthcare systems in the world, but that envy has led to the NHS becoming a victim of its own success. We have the charade of health tourism, where overseas visitors come to the UK to benefit from our excellent NHS services without making a contribution and the British taxpayer picks up the bill.

Health tourism has been particularly prevalent among migrants and visitors from the EU, who have abused the European healthcare insurance scheme for far too long. The hundreds of thousands of overseas migrants and visitors treated in Britain each year have put a strain on our health service. Although many Britons receive treatment overseas, they are far fewer in number than those who come here. Health tourism accounts for a net drain on our NHS, and I am pleased that a new Bill will allow us to recover the cost of treating overseas visitors and re-invest it in the NHS.

Of course, another way in which we could provide a huge boost to our NHS would be to stop sending £350 million every week to the EU—I fear I may be in some disagreement with my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench about this—and divert some of it back into the NHS. *[Interruption.]* I am reliably informed

that I am also in disagreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), and perhaps with quite a number of my colleagues. Our EU contributions are enough to build a new, fully-staffed NHS hospital every week.

That is not the only way in which the EU is threatening our NHS. This is something that, unfortunately, the Gracious Speech did not address. Under the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which the EU is determined to pass, the UK Government and the NHS may face legal challenge from foreign corporations if we refuse to put some of our public services, including the NHS, out to tender for privatisation. TTIP could, in effect, force the partial privatisation of the NHS, and there would be nothing the UK Government or the British people could do about it if we remained a member of the European Union. Conservative Members must not be blind to that issue or leave it to other parties to make the case. The simplest and surest way to protect the NHS from the unbearable strain of visitor cost and forced privatisation, and to save enough money to provide a new hospital every week, would be for Britain to vote to leave and take back control on 23 June.

Mr Betts: Has the hon. Gentleman thought about the fact that there will be, presumably, at some stage a trade agreement between the European Union and the United States, and that if we want to protect ourselves from unintended consequences such as those that he mentions, it is best to argue the case as part of the negotiations, rather than having to stay on the outside and accept the agreement, whatever it contains, at the end of the negotiations?

William Wragg: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I gently say to him that if such an agreement brought with it the risk of sacrificing our sovereignty and the Government's ability to determine public policy in the process of international tribunals determining matters between Governments and companies, I would, quite frankly, accept President Obama's offer to be at the back of the queue.

I was delighted to hear in the Queen's Speech that the Government will continue to strengthen our national security through investment in our armed forces, a commitment to the armed forces covenant and, vitally, a promise to fulfil our NATO commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defence. Let us not forget that it is, first and foremost, our work and friendship with allies through NATO, not through the European Union, which maintains our security on the international stage. The world is a turbulent place, but our security and defence forces keep us safe and strong, and it is right that the Queen's Speech recognises and protects that.

Now is not just the time for strengthening our national defences. The British people will soon need to show the strength of their convictions and not blink in the face of fear. I hope that they will do the right thing for Britain and vote next month to leave the European Union, and thereby free us to take control of our own country and to forge new and prosperous relationships with partners all around the world, not just those on our doorstep.

However, I am heartened by Her Majesty's most Gracious Speech, because it lays out a positive programme for government for the next year. It means that after the referendum vote on 23 June, I am confident that on

[William Wragg]

24 June we will have a strong Conservative majority Government who will lead us, united, to a Britain brighter and better, both at home and abroad.

12.39 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): May I associate the SNP group with the comments made by Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State about the EgyptAir incident?

I will focus on three themes in my speech: first, the measures that we in the SNP welcome, at least in their outline descriptions; secondly, the areas in which we think that other options and measures could have been and, indeed, should be incorporated—it is never too late for Ministers to pay heed to and take forward such ideas, so I hope they are listening carefully—and, thirdly, the actions, examples and lessons to be learned if we are to take the steps required to deliver for the people of the nations of the UK.

First, I am sure the Secretary of State will join me in welcoming Fergus Ewing MSP to his new position as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity, and Humza Yousaf MSP to his new position as Minister for Transport and the Islands. I want to put on record my thanks to the former Cabinet Secretary Keith Brown MSP and the former Minister Derek Mackay for their work, some of which I will mention. They are both now performing new roles in the Scottish Government Cabinet, and I am sure that UK Government Ministers agree that they worked positively with them during their time in office.

Mr McLoughlin: May I echo what the hon. Gentleman has said? I heard about the new appointments just before I came into the Chamber. I very much hope that we can work together positively on a number of issues that affect both Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Drew Hendry: I am sure that where there is a progressive movement, that will be the case.

I want to start with those areas on which there is common purpose, and there are some innovative transport measures—or at least promises of them. That said, if such measures are to gain support, the rhetoric will need to be followed by an inclusive vision that benefits all the nations of the UK. An area where that is not yet clear is investment in further research on autonomous vehicles. Obviously, safety implications and their deployment will need to be considered.

Such investment is welcome, but it will be meaningless to most of the UK nations if it is not supported by the necessary investment and innovation to deliver a truly universal mobile communications network. Let us not yet again take an approach through which benefits are seen only in some urban areas of the UK. Future network licensing deals should include a requirement, in the conditions of the contracts, for rural areas to be prioritised. These areas all across the nations of the UK have suffered for decades because of ill-thought strategy and, indeed, ignorance about the needs of those outside the largest cities.

Linked closely to that is the need for broadband infrastructure. The SNP has campaigned for a universal service obligation for broadband, so we are pleased that that will be included in the digital economy Bill. The Scottish Government are committed to extending superfast broadband to 100% of premises—all businesses and homes. When I recently asked the Leader of the House in the Chamber to match that ambition, he said that he did not know how it could be done. I hope that the UK Government have, in the past few weeks, figured this out and that they will roll out action to match their words. If they do, it will indeed be positive news.

Putting the UK National Infrastructure Commission on a statutory basis is also welcome, but only if it looks beyond the old horizons and prioritises infrastructure for all the nations of the UK. To achieve that, we need more ambition on the development and deployment of electric vehicle infrastructure, so I agree with the remarks of the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) about that. That and investment in autonomous vehicles must go hand in hand. It will be good if that happens, but let us see the detail because, once again, the Government should demonstrate that that matches the ambition of what they are saying.

We are entering a point in our development where, counter-intuitively, roads might actually provide another vision for the future of green transport, and I would like such an opportunity to be explored further by the UK Government. On green travel—indeed, on greener travel measures in general—we are seeking more ambition from the UK Government.

On active travel, we welcome the fact that the recent Budget did not remove salary sacrifice schemes—that will aid the promotion of cycling—but there is a huge opportunity for further investment in cycling, which would lead to healthier outcomes for people and healthy economic benefits. I urge Ministers to reconsider the lack of a strategic UK Government commitment to accelerating cycling infrastructure. Where is the promised five-year strategy and why, given the stated objectives in the cycling and walking investment strategy, is that not a headline at this time? We need greater vision, greater urgency and proof that words are equal to a true commitment.

The SNP Scottish Government are investing £1 billion annually in public transport and other sustainable transport options to encourage people to get out of their cars. Since 2011, Scotland has built 190 km of cycling and walking paths to match the commitment to healthier lives for the people of Scotland, where the number of people cycling has increased by about a third since 2003.

When the Secretary of State mentioned HS2, he said, if I am quoting him correctly, that he looks forward to it going to Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester. Ominously, however, he omitted Scotland from that list. The Scottish Government have committed to working in partnership with the UK Government on HS2, but the UK Government must demonstrate their commitment. Will he now confirm that that is correct and commit to the line going to Scotland, with the full investment needed?

HS2 is not the only possibility for cross-border rail development. The Borders rail link—a programme delivered on time and under budget by the Scottish Government—is

now open for investigation for an extension all the way to Carlisle. The Scottish Government have said that they will support a feasibility study. Will the UK Government match that ambition by agreeing to consider whether that can be realised for the people on the borders? I hope so.

On investment in green measures, there is a future for green travel for surface users—through active travel and electric developments in relation to road and rail, especially if powered by renewable sources—but there remains no vision from the UK Government on alternative fuels for air travel. Once again, the UK is stuck in the vapour trail on this issue. Oslo has already become the world's first airport to offer sustainable biofuels to all airlines—Lufthansa, SAS and KLM have already signed up to that—but there is no such commitment in the UK. The UK Government can change that, and I again urge Ministers to include aviation in the renewable transport fuels obligation.

We welcome the UK Government's commitment to do more work on a UK airspace strategy. Such a commitment is overdue, and we ask that action in this area is accelerated to address the deficit of more than 40 years. If we continue to ignore that, there will be an increased risk of delays, higher carbon use and a damaging impact on commerce. Tackling this, and coming into line with the European Commission's single European sky initiative, offers an opportunity to boost the UK economy and benefit all the UK nations.

Speaking of things up in the air, although nobody will be shocked by the lack of a commitment to deciding on airport expansion, it remains the jumbo in the room. I know that our frustration is actually shared by Government Ministers. I am certain that, freed from internal pressures, they would have made a decision by now, but they remain paralysed by orders arising from internal party politics.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you were in the Chair on the occasion when I overran the two minutes for my response to a statement on yet another delay on airport expansion, because I was trying to list the broken promises in relation to the many dates by which Ministers and, indeed, the Prime Minister had promised there would be a full and final decision. Such promises have been broken over and over, but when someone hears that long catalogue of missed opportunities for leadership, the frustration and anger caused by these delays immediately becomes understandable. You will be glad to know that, rather than repeat that exercise, I will just quote the Secretary of State's words from way back in October 2012. He said:

“in the south east the runways are filling up. And the jets are circling in our skies. That's hitting our prosperity. It's bad for the environment. It's putting off investors. It's costing jobs. And it's holding Britain back.”

He was right, but that was nearly five years ago. In spite of those sage words, the runways are now fuller, more jets are circling, the environment continues to be damaged and investors have indeed been put off. Who knows how many jobs that has cost?

Mr McLoughlin: Given that the hon. Gentleman has now had time to study the Davies report and that he is so clear in his own mind, will he tell us which option he prefers?

Drew Hendry: I would be delighted if the Secretary of State and the UK Government wanted to hand control of UK infrastructure development to the SNP, because as with the Borders rail link and the Queensferry crossing, we deliver things on time and under budget. By all means, give us the decision and we will make the choice.

Let me come on to why the decision is important for Scotland. More than 90% of international visitors to Scotland travel by air. More than a third use Heathrow as a hub and, if that is combined with Gatwick, I reckon that around half our international visitors travel through the south-east. It is not just about tourism; it is the £5 billion a year whisky industry and the £500 million salmon industry, and other shellfish and exports need to get to international markets. All the time the decision is pushed out and fudged, it harms the Scottish economy.

Another opportunity is open to the UK Government to assist not just Scotland but many other parts of the UK by bringing forward a commitment for public service obligations for linking regional airports point to point with the London hubs. That straightforward measure would point to a much more enlightened and inclusive air transport strategy. Market forces alone cannot provide fairness across all the regions and nations of the UK, and a strategic choice is needed.

We also support the establishment of the UK spaceport, which is an exciting opportunity.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): On my behalf, will my hon. Friend ask the Secretary of State to clarify his comments about this issue? I wanted to intervene on him, but unfortunately he did not hear me. He said that it would be up to market forces to decide the location of the spaceport. We have had discussions in this place about awarding a single licence to a UK spaceport, but multiple licences would be needed, because every vehicle has to be licensed. I hope that the Secretary of State will clarify whether he will let the market make the decision and if it will be possible to have multiple spaceports?

Drew Hendry: That is a very important point, and I am delighted to underline it and to ask the Secretary of State to respond. We see this development as having great possibilities and we would anticipate that, when making their decision, the UK Government will fully appreciate the excellent potential sites in Scotland. We encourage the UK Government to work with the Scottish Government, Scottish local authorities and our public agencies to realise this potential in Scotland.

We would also welcome more detail on developing a genuine aerospace strategy, which must include supporting the industry to address the skills gap in the engineering sector. I urge Ministers to consider some of the work on gender-balance issues. Not long ago in the Chamber I quoted Bridget Day, the deputy director of the national aerospace programme with more than 40 years' experience. She has highlighted her struggles as a woman in the industry. Only 11% of engineers are women, even though more than 20% of graduates are women. That is the lowest percentage of female employment in the sector across Europe.

There are also apprentice opportunities in shipping—transport should include references to shipping. The Scottish Government worked tirelessly, as they did on the Scottish steel issue, to save the iconic Ferguson

[Drew Hendry]

shipyard, which is vital to providing vessels and employment for the future. Of course, this place has decided to delay the BAE order for the Govan and Scotstoun yards with the review of shipbuilding. That delay threatens jobs in Scotland and I hope that Ministers will take that message back to the Cabinet and get the Treasury to release the brakes on that development.

On the subject of shipping, we also have an opportunity to put right the dangerous deficit that has been allowed to continue around the seas of the UK, nowhere more strikingly than on the west coast of Scotland. My right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) has highlighted on many occasions the dangers and folly of removing maritime patrol aircraft from Scotland, but when the removal of one of Scotland's two emergency towing vessels and the ongoing uncertainty over the remaining tug are added to that, it is easy to see why Ministers are facing calls from every quarter to commit to permanently securing the remaining vessel and reinstating the second. Those vessels, if deployed sensibly, can assist drifting ships, therefore preventing them from running aground, and head off disaster, protecting human lives and fragile environments. They are called emergency towing vessels for a simple reason: they are available for emergencies, such as when they were called in to rescue one of the UK's nuclear submarines that had run aground off Skye. Their retention and reinstatement has been strongly urged by everyone who understands the risks from the seas around Scotland—the marine industry, marine unions, including Nautilus, every highlands and islands MP and MSP, local authorities and agencies. They have all pointed out that we cannot wait for a disaster to happen before there is a reaction, so protection is needed so that a disaster can be prevented.

The nations of the UK need not just warm words of support for good ideas, but a connectivity strategy: a plan for air; a plan for technology; a plan for suitable sustainable fuels; a plan for marine operations; a plan for health and wellbeing; a plan for tourism; a plan for trade and enterprise; and a plan for productivity. We must see more and better work from the UK Government on those fronts.

12.56 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I am grateful to be called early in the debate. I apologise in advance for not being able to attend the wind-up speeches. I have an invitation from Her Majesty the Queen to attend a garden party at Buckingham palace this afternoon. I am sure that the Minister will understand that I am keen to do so.

I am pleased to be able to speak in this debate. Yesterday in the Gracious Speech we learned of the Government's plans to ensure that the UK will be at the forefront of technology for new forms of transport in a modern transport Bill. This is an incredibly exciting time for the country as we push forward towards a modern transport revolution, which—most excitingly—includes the potential for the UK's first commercial spaceport. I shall return to that point later.

The magnitude of the progress we are poised to make becomes very clear when we consider the many years of neglect our transport system has suffered, especially in Cornwall. However, at long last, we are seeing serious

investment in the county's transport infrastructure that will create the opportunities for the future. A £60 million project dualling a section of the A30—the main route linking Cornwall to the rest of the country—is well under way, and when finished will relieve massive congestion and delays. I am incredibly proud to be part of the Government who are finally delivering this project, which was cancelled by the Labour Government when they came to power in the 1990s. A further 9-mile stretch of single carriageway further west on the A30 is also due to be upgraded in the coming years. This route experiences a 25% rise in traffic flow in holiday periods, so the House will understand how important such projects are to the ongoing growth of the area.

For many years, residents of St Austell and the surrounding villages have been making impassioned calls for an upgraded link road between St Austell and the A30. Now their calls have finally been answered by the Government. This project, which will go ahead thanks to funding from the local major's fund, will have a significant positive impact on congestion and traffic issues in my constituency, as well as unlocking future potential economic growth.

It is not just the roads that are being upgraded. The south-west is set to benefit from new trains, replacing ones some 40 years old, and an upgraded Riviera sleeper service, and reports are being commissioned to look into cutting the journey time to London by nearly half an hour and at the much needed additional route through Devon. Meanwhile, passenger numbers at the UK's fastest growing regional airport, Cornwall-Newquay airport, continue to grow. Thanks to the Government's backing, it has been able to fly into the jet age with its link to Gatwick, as well as seeing new routes opening up. Through all of this, Cornwall is being transformed and its potential is starting to be realised, but there is still more to do.

With our unquestionable appetite to demonstrate our aspiration for growth and better times ahead, Cornwall is now eagerly edging towards the forefront of the next generation of travel opportunities and is proving itself to be the right choice for the UK's first spaceport. Although we still await the release of the final bid criteria, it is clear Newquay has established itself as the frontrunner in this process and is the best option of the six shortlisted. Newquay airport already has a wide and long runway, with the added bonus that it has the capacity to be extended fairly easily. The airport is already established and thriving, continuing to go from strength to strength, and I am sure it will embrace the growth and development the spaceport would bring. The proposed site is ideally located right next to the coast, another key factor in this process. It has easy access to uncongested airspace and of course it is not in a densely populated area.

Making Newquay's bid even more attractive are the hugely beneficial links that already exist between the airport's neighbouring Newquay Aerohub enterprise zone and Goonhilly Earth Station, after the Chancellor announced the extension of the enterprise zone to encircle Goonhilly, last autumn. This boost for Cornwall's space ambitions works to make the area even more attractive for commercial investment. As well as enabling the possibility for space tourism or high-speed travel, the spaceport provides an opportunity to embrace the commercial satellite market even further. The UK is

already a world leader in the satellite business, but with a spaceport we could finally secure satellite launch facilities of our own.

This is, undeniably, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Cornwall and for my constituency to transform our economy. We will see job opportunities and well paid careers in cutting-edge technologies. In one of the lowest-pay areas of the country, we will see higher-paid jobs brought about and, as well as welcoming new people to the area, the next generation of skilled Cornishmen and women will be able to stay in the county they love to call home, instead of being forced to move away for skilled jobs. For decades, Cornish people have been unfairly torn between their love for and desire to live in their beautiful homeland or seek serious job opportunities elsewhere. I count myself incredibly lucky to have been able to make a living without having to leave Cornwall, working in a number of sectors over many years, as well as running my own business. Sadly, that has not been the case for many of my peers, who were forced to move away in search of other opportunities, and this is still happening today, with scores of talented, skilful young people leaving Cornwall behind, often never to return. This has gone on for far too long and we can stop it. Our young people deserve the chance of having a real opportunity just as much as the rest of the country does.

Clearly, the spaceport needs a home that will embrace the brand-new sector of space tourism, and Cornwall can and will pioneer this. As well as boosting visitor numbers from within the UK even further, this could be the key to finally getting a large portion of the country's overseas visitors to the south-west; only a small percentage of overseas visitors currently venture out of London, and the benefits of this would of course be felt right across the south-west.

Furthermore, Cornwall has historically led from the front when it comes to industry. Our tin mining and china clay activities are world-renowned, and have transformed the landscape and future of Cornwall. The county is also at the forefront of inventions: the mighty Cornishman Richard Trevithick harnessed high-pressure steam and created the world's first steam railway locomotive; Humphry Davy saved hundreds of lives with his revolutionary miners' safety lamp; and of course the first ever radio transmission was sent across the Atlantic ocean from Cornwall, by Marconi. But despite that incredible heritage, Cornwall has been stifled, unable to build any further on those major advances. For too long, Cornwall has been unable to live up to its true potential. Often forgotten by Westminster, its ambitions have been ignored, but the tide is changing and Cornwall is on the up, under this Government. The granting of Newquay spaceport would be another major advancement for the region, and we are ready. The county, and Newquay in particular, is already a premier tourist destination, with millions of people flocking to the area to enjoy all it has to offer. Not only is Cornwall already equipped for such an influx of visitors, but we understand tourism better than anyone else—our communities thrive on it and have done so for more than a century.

The Government's latest infrastructure commitments and achievements in Cornwall that I outlined at the beginning show their commitment to the county, and the six Cornish Conservative MPs are unequivocally working hard within a Conservative Government to deliver for Cornwall. What better time than now to

push this forward? The Government's ongoing commitment to the county shows a belief that Cornwall holds the key to a fairer distribution of growth and is real evidence of our one nation vision. It is a belief that Cornwall can pave the way forward in this exciting new sector and a belief that Cornwall will deliver. The right choice is clear: Newquay's bid for the spaceport holds the excitement and enthusiasm for exploration, the spirit of adventure and the capability to be the driving force in scientific and technological advances. Let us make the right choice—for Newquay, for Cornwall and for the country.

1.5 pm

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): There is a great deal to welcome in this Queen's Speech in relation to transport, and it is reassuring to see how many issues addressed in it reflect the requests that have come from the Select Committee on Transport. The real test will be whether the promised measures are implemented and do not simply remain aspirations, and of course we will have to see the important details of what is being proposed. I am pleased that the National Infrastructure Commission is to be made a statutory body charged with producing strategic vision for 2050. I just hope that we are not still discussing the issue of increasing hub capacity in the south-east when we get to that date. It is very important that a decision on aviation capacity in the south-east is made soon. Heathrow is the right location and it is important that a decision is made, in the interests of this country as a whole, and on behalf of the regions and nations of this country.

The northern powerhouse also features in the Queen's Speech, and that is extremely important. Again, we do not need to hear more words; we need to see implementation of proposals and ideas that have been put forward. That means that Transport for the North needs to have effective powers and full accountability, but I do not see any mention of that in this Queen's Speech. It is of course particularly important that electrification schemes that have already been proposed are properly costed and implemented. We do not want to see any more stop-start processes, where promises are made but much needed schemes are then either delayed or cancelled. When we are looking at much needed improvements across the Pennines—the trans-Pennine improvements and the so-called HS3—it is important for Ministers to remember that trans-Pennine improvements are not confined to Manchester and Leeds, but also include Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield and Hull, to name a few of these very important places.

I am very pleased that HS2 is going ahead, but I would like more clarity from the Minister on the stories now being circulated about possible changes to phase 2. To get maximum impact from that important infrastructure, HS2 needs to be linked with other rail investments, as we have been promised. For example, we need to enable a direct line to be built from Liverpool to link up with both HS2 and HS3. That is just one example of the way in which major infrastructure investments of national importance can also bring great benefits to the regions of this country.

I am pleased about the modern transport Bill, as the promises it makes for the commercial development of transport innovations are extremely important for this country, and that has too often been neglected. I also note the reference that has been made to the importance

[Mrs Louise Ellman]

of using new technology for road safety. It is important to realise that although the trend on road safety over a decade or so is one of improvement, there has been a change in very recent years. In the last year for which we have recorded figures, 2014, we regrettably saw an increase in road casualties: 1,775 people were killed on our roads, and 22,807 people were seriously injured. Using technology to improve road safety is important, but technology on its own cannot do the job. Education and promotional campaigns and enforcement are also important. I remind Ministers that, yes, having the latest technology matters, but we also need more people enforcing the rules of the road and looking at bad driver behaviour, and we need more road traffic officers. This year, the Transport Committee produced a report that showed the impact of reductions in road traffic officers. For improved road safety, we need to harness the technology that is there and to use new technology, and we also need education and enforcement. The three go together.

I give a special welcome to the bus services Bill, although we have yet to see the critical detail of it. For too long, buses have been treated as the Cinderella of public transport, yet more people use buses than any other form of public transport. They are a lifeline for millions of people, enabling them to get to their jobs and to access important local amenities. This Bill—I hope I can repeat this when we see the detail of it—is an attempt to put right the weaknesses of the Transport Act 1985, which left bus services at the mercy of the free market, with local authorities picking up the tab for unprofitable services. London, which was spared deregulation, has gone from success to success, with franchise services using the private sector, but the private sector being employed to implement the transport plans decided by the public sector, Transport for London.

In the rest of the country, when local government cuts started to bite and financial cuts started to be implemented, local authority support for those subsidised services inevitably fell away. Increased numbers of people in communities have found that they are left out of essential transport services, with no access to work, hospitals and shops. It is not solely rural communities that have been affected, although they have been very badly affected; significant parts of towns and cities are losing not only night-time services, but important day-time services as well.

Barbara Keeley: I thank my hon. Friend for making those points. I agree with what she says. Night buses have been cut from Little Hulton in my constituency, which means that people cannot get into Manchester. Does she agree that among those who are excluded from these services are people with sight loss and that this Bill is an opportunity to make all new buses accessible for people with sight loss through next-stop and final-destination announcements?

Mrs Ellman: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments, and I certainly agree with her. A proper public transport service that includes buses has to be accessible for all people, and proper facilities should be available to enable people with sight loss and with other sorts of disabilities to use the service. This is a very important

opportunity to do that. Indeed, the whole pattern that we have seen since bus deregulation is that, while services in London, where deregulation did not take place, have increased, services elsewhere in the country have reduced and bus fares have increased. That is not acceptable, and it cannot be tolerated any further. Measures to try to remedy that by having quality partnerships and quality contracts—the partnerships have been effective in some areas—have not resolved the basic question.

I look forward to the publication of the bus services Bill. Given the situation that currently operates so successfully in London, the proposal now is to enable devolved areas with an elected mayor to use franchise services. However, I would like to see the detail of how that can be extended to other sorts of authorities as well and to see what financial support goes with that. The power to make bus services accessible, accountable and effective is extremely important, but the finance to make that a real possibility must be there to go with it, so I look forward to seeing that.

In summary, I welcome some very important measures in the Bill. We need them to be enacted and not just to remain aspirations, and we need proper funding, too. It is vital that proper transport infrastructure is provided nationally, regionally and locally. It is also important that there are effective transport services that are accessible and passenger friendly. The test of whether this Queen's Speech will deliver those objectives is yet to come.

1.15 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I wish to focus my remarks on neighbourhood planning and the effects on housing delivery, but first let me draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Just before the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), leaves the Chamber, may I make a very quick pitch for the A64? I welcome the £100 billion investment in infrastructure and the £13 billion investment in the northern powerhouse in this Parliament. A small part of that—£250 million—has been allocated to the A64, for the Hopgrove Lane roundabout. If that improvement does not include a dual carriageway as far as Barton Hill, it will simply kick that pinchpoint down the road. I ask him to bear that in mind and look at it in future discussions with Highways England.

I was astounded to hear the Leader of the Opposition claim in this House yesterday that

“housebuilding has sunk to its lowest level since the 1920s.”—[*Official Report*, 18 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 15.]

According to the Office for National Statistics, quarterly housing starts, which are without doubt the most reliable guide to housing activity, have doubled from fewer than 20,000 in the first quarter of 2009 to more than 40,000 in the current quarter. For further proof, I suggest that Opposition Members visit any builder's merchant or building site and talk to any brickie, chippie or sparky who will put them right. If they do not know any of these business people, I am happy to put them in touch with some.

I welcome the Government's approach to local plans, which requires all local authorities to have a plan in place by 2017, and to neighbourhood plans. Neighbourhood plans give local people and local

communities a say in what is built where, and what the building or settlement will look like. Clearly, neighbourhood planning must work with local authorities to agree the numbers allocated to a particular settlement. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) who has been generous with his time not only in his work with the Government, but in volunteering to visit my constituency to help our local communities to develop their own neighbourhood plans.

Without question, neighbourhood plans are part of the solution to the increase in housebuilding that we need. I welcome the changes contained in the Queen's Speech to make neighbourhood planning easier and more powerful for local communities. I do not support any community right of appeal, as planning is tough enough without adding more obstacles to the planning process. However, current rules and subjective calculations of the five-year land supply can undermine the expensive and time-consuming process of neighbourhood planning. For example, Gladman, a name that strikes fear in many planning officers, has been successful twice recently at Kirbymoorside and Easingwold in my constituency.

Gladman was successful on appeal in Easingwold thanks to its ability to demonstrate that Hambleton District Council had only 4.17 years of land supply. Nine months later, after a revised analysis carried out by another expensive consultant for the local authority, Hambleton District Council now believes that it has an eight-plus year land supply. In effect, this creates two perverse outcomes. A subjective approach to the assessment of housing market needs incentivises the kite-flying carpetbaggers such as Gladman to game the system, but it also disincentivises local communities from establishing a neighbourhood plan. Even though a neighbourhood may be ahead of its own housing numbers, a shortage in the local authority overall can mean that an inappropriate development is forced on that local community.

Perhaps I can suggest two simple solutions, consistent with the recommendations of the local plans expert group, which says that there is currently no definitive guidance on the way to prepare the strategic housing market assessment. The first solution would be simple definitive and objective guidance on assessment of housing needs, revised only at specified intervals. I suggest that one might base that on a brutally simple formula. There are 26 million homes in the UK, and we need to build around 250,000 homes per annum—roughly 1%. If each local authority grew by a minimum of 1%, we would meet our national housing targets for the first time in decades.

Secondly, there should be a housing delivery test for a neighbourhood planning area so that if the neighbourhood was hitting its prescribed numbers, it could not be subject to an aggressive application based on local authority under-delivery. That would simultaneously deter the kite flyers and encourage and incentivise more communities to develop their own neighbourhood plans and schemes that communities had proposed and consented to.

Mr Betts: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments about a common basis for assessing housing need. It is something that the Communities and Local Government Committee recommended in the previous Parliament, something that the specialist group that the

Minister set up has recommended, and something that Lord Taylor of Goss Moor recommended in his work on planning guidance. It would take a lot of the heat out of local controversy about how numbers were arrived at, and it would be there for local authorities to take up if they wanted to. The hon. Gentleman makes a good proposal that the Government ought to take seriously.

Kevin Hollinrake: I am very grateful. As on many occasions in the Select Committee, the hon. Gentleman and I are in full agreement.

I now move on to another important issue in my community. According to almost every business person and key business organisations such as the Institute of Directors, the No. 1 business priority in the UK and for many business people in my community is access to digital connections—superfast broadband and mobile phone networks. To give the Government credit, we have seen a step change in access to these networks since 2010. Even in rural North Yorkshire, 88% of premises are now covered by superfast broadband; 91% will be by 2017, and 95% by 2019. However, there is a growing gap between the haves and the have nots. As coverage increases, the voices of those without broadband understandably grow louder and more vociferous. For home or business, superfast broadband is no longer regarded as a luxury but as an essential fourth utility, and we must treat it as such.

I welcome the bold ambition in the Queen's Speech for our universal service obligation—a digital imperative that the Government will deliver on. To meet this imperative and the further commitment to increase speed as demand and activity also increase, we need a new relationship between the consumer and the network operator, especially BT Openreach. I must say, I am sceptical about Ofcom's halfway house solution—an internal separation of Openreach and BT. It is, to my mind, inconceivable that a separate board and a separation of assets will separate the vested interest of a network from the commercial opportunity of the wholesale, retail and content provider operations of BT.

I and many colleagues will hold Ofcom and BT Openreach to account for the huge improvements required, especially including fair cost for access to its ducts and poles and a clear network map of their locations. Only this and a technology-neutral approach will deliver the solutions that we need. BT Openreach has actively thus far deterred third-party operators and complementary technology solutions from reaching the parts that other technologies cannot reach, namely, point-to-point wireless, wireless DSLAM—digital subscriber line access multiplexer—units and, of course a roll-out of fibre to the premises, or FTTP, the only future-proof solution available. Our penetration for fibre to premises in the UK is 2%, compared with 60% in Spain, where competitors can access ducts and poles more cheaply and readily.

May I also suggest to the Government that we look at creative community solutions? The voucher scheme for satellite is welcome, but would Ministers consider allowing residents to combine vouchers to contribute to the cost of installing community-based fibre schemes? We also need more clarity and co-operation between backbone operator Openreach and other technologies so that solutions can be provided today. If community or commercial point-to-point wireless providers are deterred through future roll-out plans, uncertainty about those

[Kevin Hollinrake]

solutions means that they are sidelined rather than rolled out to people in need.

These are real people with real businesses and real jobs. Ample Bosom in Cold Kirby in my constituency provides quality ladies' garments for the larger lady; the Construction Equipment Association in Sproxtton provides services for exhibitions around the world; the Black Swan is an award-winning hostelry close to where I live in Oldstead. They are all suffering and losing business as a result of the broadband delays and deferrals.

I am very pleased with the measures in the Queen's Speech and commend those policy initiatives to the House.

1.26 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I do not think I can follow the last points that the hon. Gentleman raised about certain garment manufacturers in his constituency, so I will rapidly move on to devolution, in which I am particularly interested. I want to talk about the proposals on business rates, buses and housing.

The words "northern powerhouse" have been mentioned again in the Queen's Speech. We could not have them ignored by the Government. Ministers have to be aware that, while there is a welcome for the general intentions on devolution to increase the performance of our northern cities to the national average—we are unique in the European Union in that our major cities do not perform better than the national average economically—there is a great deal of scepticism in my constituency and the Sheffield city region as we see job losses. More than 600 jobs have been lost from HSBC in Sheffield and more at Tankersley. Polestar in my constituency is in administration, with 400 jobs under threat. On top of that there is uncertainty over steel plants at Stocksbridge and Rotherham. We look to the Government at least to recognise the importance of all these things.

But then we see the Government themselves creating 600 job losses at HMRC and, in contradiction to what the Transport Secretary said, moving 200 jobs from BIS headquarters in Sheffield down to London, without giving any rationale of cost savings. Indeed, it is pretty obvious that it will cost more to move staff from Sheffield to London. The Government talk about devolving powers, but they are centralising jobs. That is causing a great deal of anger in Sheffield, and the Government could do something here and now: stop and give a clear indication that their words about the northern powerhouse mean something in practice for people who live in my constituency and others in the Sheffield city region.

The first major devolved powers Bill in the Queen's Speech deals with business rates. I am pleased that the Secretary of State has had discussions with the Communities and Local Government Committee. We are conducting inquiries with the intention of assisting that process. There is general support for 100% localisation of business rates, and we want to help in that process. We are already hearing about difficulties that need resolution, whether it be matters that will be devolved alongside 100% retention of business rates, the appeals system, concerns about what happens if an area suddenly loses a major firm that contributes to its rateable income, revaluations, or the very difficult issue of how to marry

incentives to growth with help through equalisation for areas that cannot grow as quickly as others. There are a lot of issues there. I believe that the Government recognise the complications and they are going to conduct a further consultation this summer. It is right that we get this policy correct, so making sure we have a bit more time to do that is more important than rushing. The Select Committee will produce an interim report to advise the consultation, then come back later with ministerial information and evidence to produce a final report. That is a good example of a Select Committee and the Government working together to achieve a shared objective.

Having said that, in its devolution report the Committee has already said that 100% retention of business rates should only be a first step in wider fiscal devolution. We hope the Government will engage in that debate, once the Bill has passed. There is a challenge in that we are only devolving retention of the money from business rates, with a bit of power for areas—certainly those with elected mayors—to reduce the rate or impose a small levy for infrastructure projects; what we will not have is local control over the business rates system itself. If a future Government made a significant change, like the one just made to small business rate relief, that could after 2020 significantly affect local authorities' rate income without their having any say in the system and changes to it. There is a wider debate to be had on whether to have just retention of business rates, or wider localisation of the business rates system itself. I am sure we will return to that when we discuss the Bill.

I welcome the buses Bill. It is right that an important part of devolution deals is the ability for local mayors, if they so wish, to take up franchising arrangements similar to those found in London. Current legislation is inadequate: in the north-east, where transport authorities want to go for quality contracts, they are second-guessed by independent bodies that come to a different view on what the public interest is. I take the old-fashioned view that local elected councillors and mayors are better placed to identify the public interest than any appointed quango.

Franchising of itself is not a panacea for all ills, but it can help to drive up standards, improve ticketing arrangements and make better use of resources by ensuring that there is not overprovision of buses on some routes and none on others. It can deal better with pensioner concessions and reverse the downward trend—the 50% fall in bus trips per head of population—seen in areas such as Sheffield since deregulation came into effect in the 1980s. We proudly pioneered cheap fares and high-quality public transport in South Yorkshire back in the 1970s—even before the Greater London Council did so—but it has been downhill ever since deregulation came into effect.

The buses Bill will work only if it is seen as part of a wider approach to integrated transport. I wish to put on the record my great disappointment that the tram-train project has once again been delayed. Network Rail has announced that after 10 years of thinking about it, the delay until 2017 is now unachievable, and it cannot even tell us the new delay date that it will set at some point in the future. That is a disgrace. Network Rail is bringing in a tram-train system that has been operating in Germany for 30 years. Thirty years in Germany, 10 years thinking

about it in the UK, and we do not even have a date when the trams will start running on the tram-train network. I was pleased when, in December in Sheffield, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), got on one of the trams that have been delivered, but now we have no date for when it will run on the tram-train tracks. This is complete nonsense and the Government should launch an inquiry into it.

On wider transport issues, we still want firmer assurances from the Government that the station for HS2 will be in Sheffield and that HS3 will link Sheffield and Leeds across the Pennines. We also want a commitment to the review of the Pennine tunnel, in which many of us are interested.

I am pleased to see the Minister for Housing and Planning in his place. During the general election, we had promises of 1 million homes from the Conservative party. I think that was then a target, but afterward, when I asked him about the target, the Minister said it was only an aspiration. Now that the 1 million figure has been in the Queen's Speech, I assume it is a clear and firm commitment—you do not put figures in the Queen's Speech without committing to them, do you, Madam Deputy Speaker? Of course not.

My concern arises from what the Council of Mortgage Lenders said yesterday, in a very interesting piece, about not being sure that the 200,000 starter homes and the 125,000 shared ownership properties were deliverable. The CML thought the numbers were too big and raised questions about market distortion, valuations—it had a whole load of questions about the fundamental building block of the Government's programme to getting 1 million new homes. At some point, the penny will drop with Ministers that we will not achieve the 250,000 homes we need to build in this country without a substantial programme of social house building, with local councils as well as housing associations forming a key part. Without that commitment—the Government have taken all the money away from social housing; there will be no section 106 money for housing either—I simply do not believe the Government will achieve their million homes. I do not know whether the Minister for Housing and Planning will be here in four years' time to answer for that. He probably hopes he will be elsewhere and not responsible for explaining why that figure has not been reached.

Turning to something completely different, yesterday, with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and a number of other Members, I had the pleasure of accompanying members of the Somaliland community in England to Downing Street to present a letter to the Prime Minister. Somaliland achieved independence from the British empire 25 years ago yesterday. Its subsequent history has been troubled: it had a union with Somalia, which was an Italian protectorate, then a bitter civil war, fighting against a dictatorship. Through that process, Somaliland achieved *de facto* independence. It is now run as a democracy, having had presidential elections, having changed presidents and having had narrow election results that were accepted by the losers.

Somaliland is a democracy, but it is not recognised by the international community. I understand that it is difficult for the United Kingdom Government, as the former colonial power, to be the first country to recognise

Somaliland. All I will ask, and all Somaliland's Government and the community in this country are asking for, is that the British Government will at least give an undertaking that they would accept, recognise and encourage an international commission on the status of Somaliland looking at the fact that it is *de facto* an independent country, but *de jure* it is still not recognised by the international community.

1.37 pm

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I was extremely pleased yesterday to see infrastructure and transport feature so prominently in the Gracious Address, not just because of the impact on my constituency but because it shows how keen the Government are to deliver economic growth. Infrastructure and transport are at the heart of getting on with growing our economy in the west of England and the rest of the UK.

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), who is the railways Minister, has visited my constituency many times and stood with me wearing orange overalls, looking at train lines and breathing in heavy smog. I campaigned last year to "Stop Bath Stalling" and she joined me in my pledge to do all I could to tackle our transport problems and disgusting air pollution. Many hon. Members know, from visiting the world heritage city of Bath, that it is blighted by traffic and dangerously high levels of air pollution. Plans to encourage more residents and visitors to use public transport, as well as large-scale infrastructure projects that divert traffic around the city, will be huge steps in reducing the problem.

In an example that I hope the Ministers present will pass on to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, our hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), who is the roads Minister and who has been working with me, one of the key plans in Bath and north-east Somerset is our integrated transport plan. That involves the long overdue—by 30 years—A36-A46 link road. Thirty years is long enough to wait to get on with a critical transport project. For vehicles to bypass Bath and still reach their destination, it is crucial to get on and build this critical link road.

I am sure it will come as no surprise to the Minister that I wanted to raise this issue, as it is probably the only thing that I ever talk to her about, as well as the Government's commitment to transport. The Prime Minister wrote to me recently to extend his invitation to me to work with Highways England on that crucial project. Following the changes to vehicle excise duty that were announced in the Budget, I hope funding will become available to fund our strategic highways network. If anyone is looking for an anecdote to use in the next pub quiz, here is one: the A36-A46 is the only strategic highway in the entire UK not to be connected. That will no doubt feature in many pub quizzes across the UK.

Other transport plans that will help Bath function more easily and become a much more prosperous city include a new junction 18A on the M4, which was announced by the Prime Minister just before the election. It will ensure that our science park, which is owned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, can be accessed by the University of Bath. The greatest investment in the railway since Victorian times, the electrification of the great western main line, will make

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a massive impact on the regional economy in the west of England. So too will the improvements to the cycling network, and a rail link between Heathrow airport and the great western main line. Those four miles of track, which are long overdue, would make a massive difference over to the west and do not need to be put on hold until a decision is reached on Heathrow airport expansion. Some of these improvements are already in place and I look forward to working with the Government to see more of them come to fruition through Bills that were announced yesterday.

On the subject of Heathrow, I join other Members in hoping that a decision on where to build a third runway will be made this year. It has taken far too long and we need to make a decision as soon as possible to enable our country and our economy to grow. We hope, too, that the resources will be found to pay for that, and that the announcement will be made shortly.

I was pleased to hear that action will be taken that will ensure that the UK leads the way in developing the technology for driverless cars. Those cars present a unique opportunity to change transport fundamentally in this country, by cutting congestion, reducing emissions and saving lives. It is important that the Government recognise the need to accommodate technological innovation, so I am encouraged that this House will consider legislation for the insuring of driverless cars, preparing for the future. As I understand it, companies in Bath are looking at introducing this technology in order to reap the benefits that it promises to bring. I am glad there is no Whip present, as a Whip would not be pleased to hear me say that I look forward to reading the detail of the Bill to find out what the legislation will say and how that will benefit the wider sector.

I turn to the buses Bill and the reforms to public transport services that it will bring. The Minister will be pleased to hear that I promise not to bore the House by going through my bus timetable for Bath. The west of England devolution deal is in the negotiation process, and I hope we can come to a positive conclusion so that the deal can be sealed as quickly as possible. Our regional economy will benefit massively from devolution and from the franchising powers being devolved to the region in the buses legislation if it comes to fruition.

To encourage more people in Bath and the west of England to use buses, an integrated strategy is needed, especially across rural areas. If we integrate services, economies of scale can be produced to help pass on savings to travellers, just as they were when they were introduced in London. I have met numerous passenger focus groups in Bath which are all concerned with the future viability of services. The new buses Bill and the potential devolved solution in the west of England will ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the project.

Users want to be confident that they can complete their journey easily at a reduced cost and on time. Passengers will be delighted to hear that the buses Bill will require operators to share route, fare and schedule data with app developers so that travellers can keep up to date on the move with how the journey is likely to progress. To make it even easier for commuters, we need to see smart ticketing introduced. At a time when we can pay for a cup of coffee with a tap of our card, it is crazy that across the bus network in Bath and throughout

the country outside London the only way to pay to use the bus is to have the correct change. Many of our constituents rely almost solely on their bank cards and the need to find cash to use a bus leads many to get into their car.

As soon as smartcard ticketing was introduced in London, passenger numbers went up and prices went down. The introduction of a similar integrated and technology-focused system will reduce congestion in Bath, Bristol and across the west of England, and confront the disgustingly high levels of air pollution. I hope the Bill will bring bus travel across the country into the 21st century.

I cannot speak in a debate on infrastructure without taking a moment to discuss the important subject of broadband, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) spoke so eloquently. Like most Members across the House, I am inundated with complaints about the problems of accessing high speed broadband. Even in cities such as Bath and Bristol, which have the fastest-growing tech economy in the UK, people struggle to access high speed broadband, and productivity is thus thwarted. In 2016 that should not be the case. Together with colleagues across the House, I welcome the digital economy Bill, with a commitment to the broadband universal service obligation. This improvement to broadband is essential for maintaining and growing a strong economy and I look forward to supporting the Government in passing this legislation.

Finally, I cannot speak on infrastructure without drawing attention to the critical shortage of housing in the west of England. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning came to Bath a couple of months ago to lay the first bricks for new homes, but it is clear that in the Victorian, Georgian and Roman cities that many of us represent, the housing and the road networks were not built to sustain the growth that has since taken place. If as a result of the infrastructure Bill we lay better equipped roads and better railway systems to serve our housing needs first, rather than as an afterthought, we will be able to get on and deliver the new towns that we desperately need across the whole of the UK.

In conclusion, I welcome the Government's continued commitment to supporting the economic recovery by focusing on creating jobs and apprenticeships and investing in infrastructure. Historically the UK has spent far too little on infrastructure compared with other countries. Although there is much talk about the need to get things done, the delivery of infrastructure projects entails a lengthy process and remains disappointingly slow. At both national and local level we must remember that efforts need to be made to ensure that large infrastructure projects come to fruition in a timely manner. That is the responsibility of Government, devolved Government and local councils. I hope that that is remembered as we look forward, hopefully, to building my long overdue A36-A46 link road.

1.47 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Like the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), I start with an apology. Unfortunately, I will be unable to stay for the duration of the debate and to listen to the summing-up. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, however, I am not going to Buckingham Palace; I am going back to my constituency.

The theme of today's debate is transport and local infrastructure, and there is no doubt that infrastructure investment drives growth and creates both construction jobs and long-term business-related jobs. Any sensible investment in infrastructure is therefore to be welcomed, but I believe that more can be done, which is why the SNP's proposal to release additional spending of 0.5% per year in real terms for public services over the period to 2020 should be considered. That would free up an additional £150 billion, eliminating the needless £40 billion of cuts in the Chancellor's austerity budgets. It would allow something to be done about the transitional arrangements called for by WASPI—the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign—and still leave money for long-term investment to stimulate growth. Such a proposal would lead to net debt and borrowing falling over the current Parliament.

Another way of freeing up money for sensible infrastructure investment would be to scrap the idea of Trident renewal, which has an estimated cost of £205 billion. If the SNP's proposal for an alternative summer Budget was implemented, the majority of the Chancellor's £32 billion giveaways through tax and other means could be reversed. We could scrap the £28 billion commitment to Hinkley Point C and the five other nuclear power stations in the pipeline, which would create another half a trillion pounds for investment in infrastructure—a truly transformational sum. That would double the current allocation within the UK's national infrastructure delivery plan, and allow for that plan to be truly national and for Scotland to get its fair share of investment.

What could we do with such additional money? We have heard a lot about roads, and additional roads investment in the rest of the UK would be welcome. However, another issue associated with roads is the shortage of heavy goods vehicle drivers. This could have an impact on us all because of the knock-on effect on the price of goods in the shops, given that within the UK 85% of consumption goods are delivered by road. It could also have knock-on impact on exports—another target that the Chancellor is currently failing on. The industry suggests that there could be a shortage of some 45,000 HGV drivers by 2020. It is well known that the cost of driver training is approximately £3,000, which prevents many individuals from being able to take it up, and the test costs a further £230. There is no way that someone who is unemployed with little income can access that, and someone who is young can forget it, because they clearly do not have that money behind them. A Government initiative in this area could create additional career opportunities for the younger generation.

When this matter has been raised in the Chamber before, the Government have said that it is the industry's responsibility to step up. However, given that the average fleet size is just six trucks, and that 85% of haulage companies are classified as medium or small, the industry does not have the capacity to step up. In reality, the Government are missing a trick. In simple terms, covering the cost of training and testing is much cheaper than the payments associated with companies involved in the workfare programme and, of course, if people are put into employment, that reduces welfare payments in general. I estimate that the payback period in Government welfare and overhead costs would be in the region of six to 12 months, depending on the age of the person on

jobseeker's allowance, for each licence that the Government paid for. While I am not asking for additional investment, this would be a spend-to-save move that could make inroads into the figure of 630,000 unemployed 18 to 24-year-olds.

For many people, the most important aspect of local infrastructure is housing. We cautiously welcome the UK Government's ambition to deliver 1 million new homes, but we do not know what mix of housing will be included in that, and so far the UK Government have had a poor record on affordable homes. I have often spoken out against the extended right to buy for social housing. It is obvious that the only way to ease the housing crisis is to build more homes—not just homes for sale, but homes for rent at affordable prices. Instead, as the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) said, we have a Government who are potentially crippling housing associations with enforced rent cuts as well as the sale of more attractive stock. In Scotland, after years of sell-off without replacement, the SNP has ended the right to buy for council houses. That was absolutely the right thing to do when faced with such an imbalanced and depleted stock.

The UK Government continue the myth that like-for-like replacement will be the solution, but there is no guarantee of what that really means, nor about the geographical location of the replacement houses, given that they are clearly dependent on land supply. The latest figures indicate that since the new right to buy was introduced in 2012-13, there have been over 35,000 sales, with on-site starts of just over 4,100. Clearly, at the moment, there is not realistically going to be like-for-like replacement. Indeed, a National Audit Office report in March confirmed that 8,500 homes were sold in 2014-15 and that, in order for those to be replaced in the target three-year period, on-site starts needed to rise fourfold from an average of 420 per quarter to 2,130 per quarter. It would be good to know what Ministers are going to do to achieve that.

To demonstrate that much more can be done, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has highlighted that the Scottish Government spend 85% more per head on social housing than is the case in England and Wales. The SNP Government outperform other parts of the UK in terms of social sector completions, with over 31,000 affordable homes delivered to date, two thirds of which are available for social rent. The SNP is delivering on promises, which was why we were elected for a third term.

I would like much more investment in transport infrastructure in general. My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) suggested further rail investment. We could extend the Borders rail link to Carlisle. More needs to be done on the high-speed rail line, which should be extended to Scotland. At the very least, the existing network north of Crewe needs to be upgraded to allow for quicker journey times when we move to the classic-compatible trains.

We welcome the idea of a spaceport, but it is vital that the Government set out clear assessment criteria and timescales for making a decision. In general, I would support any of the Scottish airports that are shortlisted but, like many other people, I want to make a pitch for my local airport, which is Prestwick in the adjoining constituency. This would give my constituency a great boost, but it is also the most logical choice. In

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terms of existing transport infrastructure, we have Ayr harbour; a railway, including a halt at Prestwick; and close links to the motorway network. There is therefore no doubt that Prestwick is the most accessible of the airports under consideration. There is already an aerospace industry located around Prestwick, and nearby Glasgow has existing space technology firms. Prestwick has one of the longest runways in the UK and does not suffer from fog problems. It really is a logical choice.

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of infrastructure investment. It is something that the SNP Scottish Government have taken seriously since coming to power in 2007, with investment of over £15 billion in transport, including the largest road investment programme that Scotland has ever seen. We have heard about the new Queensferry crossing and the 31 miles of new Borders rail. Infrastructure investment drives growth, reduces congestion and increases productivity. Conservative Members and some Opposition Members are wedded to the idea of austerity and Trident at any cost. I suggest that additional investment in roads, rail, housing, broadband access for all and energy security are more likely to get Members re-elected and, importantly, to create a true legacy that would stand the test of time.

1.57 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful to be called to contribute to the debate on the Queen's Speech and very pleased to follow the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown).

I want to start by covering a few transport issues. It is good that the Government are taking action on drones, which are a nuisance and in danger of even becoming a menace to commercial aviation. However, the big absence in the Secretary of State's speech was any reference to aviation expansion and the decision on the Airports Commission report which, as we all know, is long overdue. As such, it was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) and the hon. Members for Bath (Ben Howlett) and for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry).

It is 40 or 50 years since there has been any increase in airport capacity in the south-east. We have had the 2003 White Paper, the 2008 decision by the previous Labour Government, the withdrawal of support for the third runway at Heathrow in the 2010 Tory manifesto, the coalition decision stimulated by the Lib Dems, the U-turn in 2012, the Airports Commission in 2013, and the promise year on year that we will get a decision. We are still awaiting that decision, so we hope to see it sooner rather than later. My preference is for Heathrow, but I would not like Gatwick to be frustrated, because aviation is an important economic tool for the UK internationally, and it is important for parts of the UK that rely on international connections. It therefore would be good to see movement on this.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey also mentioned shipping, to his credit. It was disappointing that the Secretary of State did not mention shipping in any sense, because it is important to the UK economy and still contributes billions of pounds. Notwithstanding the challenges to which the SNP's spokesman referred, the Government have a

fairly good record on supporting shipping, so I am surprised that they did not want to make more of that. Perhaps when the Housing and Planning Minister winds up the debate, he will say, "Shipping is important to the UK Government."

As the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South, said, deregulation of buses outside London has not worked. The Secretary of State blamed Labour policy from 1999, which was a little time ago. Quality contracts have not worked, but privatisation and franchising have worked in London, because they have been regulated, so that should be done elsewhere. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) has said that the approach should not be restricted to those local authorities that have elected mayors; it should apply to all local authorities right around the country. I am grateful to the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association for its briefing, to which several colleagues have referred, on how successful the talking buses campaign has been in London and why it should be replicated across the country.

I have another two points to make about transport before I move on to housing. On road safety, in 2010 the Government eliminated targets for reducing the number of people who are killed or seriously injured on our roads, because the then Secretary of State did not support any targets that the Government might not be able to meet and failure would give others the opportunity to criticise them. There has been consensus across the House for more than 30 years about the ambition to reduce deaths and serious injury on our roads.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): I would be delighted to listen further to the hon. Gentleman, but I just want to correct him on this point: targets are not the same as results. I am sure that he will celebrate with me the fact that British roads are safer than they have ever been. One death on our roads is too many, however, and we continue to work effectively to drive down both the number of road deaths and the causes of accidents.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I do not for a second underestimate the Government's ambition to reduce deaths and serious injury; my point is that we need to demonstrate that ambition. We have had targets to reduce deaths and serious injury on our roads for more than 30 years. They started under Mrs Thatcher, when the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) was the road safety Minister, and they have been successful. Basically, such targets say to people, "This year has been unacceptable, so next year we're going to try to do this." For the past 35 years, the numbers have been scaled down, but for the past six years they have plateaued, and in one instance increased. That is an indictment not of the Government, but of the fact that we have lost sight of ambition, so the Government should bring that back.

I have spoken about this to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), who has responsibility for road safety, and the Secretary of State, and I know that they are sympathetic. The approach is contradictory, because the British Government sign up to European Union and United Nations targets while our roads are among the safest in the world. We should be proud of that and broadcast it, but the fact is that we are in denial.

Drew Hendry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his earlier comments. On road safety, does he agree that if one of the driving principles behind developing driverless technology in the UK is increased safety, it should apply across the length and breadth of the nations of the UK, not just in urban areas?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The hon. Gentleman is correct. Most people who listen to media reports might think, “There’s nobody in charge of driverless vehicles, so they’re more dangerous and riskier.” The reality, however, is that the technology now exists for automatic stop, electronic stability control and anti-skid brakes, which make the vehicles much safer. It is the human element—people who are on their mobile phones, who have been drinking or taking drugs, who are not wearing seatbelts, or who are speeding—that causes most crashes and deaths. If we take out the human element, we will see the number of road crashes tumble and a fall in deaths and serious injury. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the proposal should be extended right across the piece.

My only other point on transport relates to air quality. Transport contributes to more than 20% of emissions. With the advent of new technology, there is real scope to reduce that figure. I hope that the Government will work with the new Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, on his commitment to address the issue more seriously than it has been for years.

On housing, the biggest issue in my constituency, London and the vast majority of the country is the need to build new homes. The Housing and Planning Minister has acknowledged that I do not think that the Housing and Planning Act 2016 will help. Selling off the most expensive properties in Tower Hamlets will not help our housing crisis, because it is the bigger homes that will be sold off and that will affect larger families. The imposition of market rents in and around Canary Wharf means that local people will not be able to afford them. On the sell-off of housing association homes, we need local replacements. A percentage of all new developments need to be affordable homes.

London needs people working in the city. For example, how do we expect Palace of Westminster staff to be able to get here 24/7, from all parts of London and the south-east, whether they be security officers, police officers, cooks, cleaners or involved in other duties, if they do not have somewhere affordable to stay in London? We are pricing them out of the market and making it more difficult for them to get in. London’s economic infrastructure will be negatively affected if we do not make sure that affordable housing is available.

Finally on housing, I want to refer to the speech that the hon. Member for Worthing West made on leasehold reform yesterday, which can be found at columns 71 to 75 of *Hansard*. I thank the Housing and Planning Minister for his interest in the matter. We have had several meetings with him and his civil servants on leasehold reform. The hon. Member for Worthing West has also been to No. 10. I hope we can make progress on leasehold reform, including the right to buy, retirement homes and private sector sales, which represent the vast majority of new properties. The sector is raising its own standards, but most of us believe that it requires regulation and statutory reform. The Leasehold Knowledge Partnership is working very hard to help people who are in a very difficult situation.

I am disappointed that there is nothing in the Queen’s Speech on banning the use of wild animals in circuses. On Tuesday I attended a photocall at No. 10 with kids from Devonshire Road Primary School in Bolton. This is a Government commitment, and the Prime Minister has made a personal commitment, that it will be in the legislative programme by 2020. I am sure that it will come, but it is disappointing that it is not happening now. It is not a major issue in general national politics, but it affects a lot of people around the country.

Business rate retention for local authorities is great news for my constituency in Tower Hamlets. We are on the City of London fringe, and Canary Wharf is at the heart of my constituency. Holding on to those business rates will result in us moving from being one of poorest to one of the richest boroughs in the country. Obviously, the Government will have a mechanism to equalise, which has always been the case. I am not clear on how that is going to work, so I look forward to hearing the Minister explain it later, if he has time.

During business questions this morning, the shadow Leader of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), said that he welcomed the National Citizen Service being put on a statutory footing, but youth services have been cut right across the piece. There are some great organisations in my constituency, including 2nd East London scout group, 31 Tower Hamlets air cadet training corps, the Marine Society and Sea Cadets, and the Prince’s Trust, which has recently moved its London and south-east headquarters to Mile End. They are doing fantastic work and it is equally welcome to see an adult service being put on a statutory basis. Organisations such as Keep Britain Tidy will be very much in support of that.

On local government and planning, when we passed the Planning Act 2008, the shadow Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), who is on the Front Bench and might speak later, led on the Bill for the Labour Government. We introduced an independent planning commission for nationally significant infrastructure projects. One of the first things the coalition did was repeal that Act, and five years later the Conservatives recognise that a fast-track planning procedure is needed for nationally significant infrastructure.

There is a real conflict for local councils that have the prospect of shale extraction and fracking. Notwithstanding the clamour from the environmental movement and the Greens for shale extraction not to be proceeded with, I think the vast majority of people in the country would much rather that we use our own natural resources than import gas from the US, Qatar or Russia. Shale extraction makes much more sense for our economic security, but the Government have to address the conflict between local communities being panicked and scaremongered into opposing shale extraction applications and the need for that national industry to be developed.

The measures on counter-extremism, anti-terrorism and security are all welcome. We are living in much more dangerous times, and getting the right balance between civil liberties and the opportunity for the security and intelligence forces to protect us is a real challenge. When the three girls from Bethnal Green went to Syria, people asked why the security forces and the police had not intervened, but exactly the same people objected when the Government tried to improve security, intelligence

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gathering and interception. I supported identity cards under the Labour Government. I thought it was wrong that we did not proceed with them, and it is wrong that the current Government are not doing so. They would be a simple mechanism and a positive step forward at a time when we are all carrying ID in the shape of credit cards, contactless payments cards or whatever.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker.

2.11 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): I want to talk about the importance of rail manufacturing, and primarily about the importance of Hitachi to the local economy in my constituency. The Hitachi Rail Europe factory in Newton Aycliffe opened last year and is creating 730 jobs, with many more in the supply chain. The factory is a superb, modern facility. Costing £82 million, it is the largest private sector investment in the north-east of England since Nissan. The factory's first task is to build the next generation of inter-city trains for the Great Western line, which will begin entering service next year. It will then build trains for the east coast main line from 2018. For those who use the service on a regular basis, that day cannot come too soon. The company has also won contracts for commuter trains in Scotland and on the trans-Pennine route.

Hitachi built the first bullet train in Japan in the 1960s, and I understand it is now on its seventh series of bullet trains. I want to see that technology brought to Britain and manufactured in Newton Aycliffe. Hitachi's expertise means that it could manufacture the rolling stock for HS2 in Newton Aycliffe if it wins the contract. That would provide a great boost to manufacturing in the north-east and the rest of the UK. I see the 730 jobs that are already to be created as a minimum.

There are other areas of expansion. Hitachi Rail Europe has that name for a simple reason: it sees the UK and the north-east as its launch pad for exporting rolling stock into the European Union. That is one reason why our continued membership of the EU is vital. Hitachi has shown great confidence in UK manufacturing's capabilities, and I can only endorse its faith in the workforce of Newton Aycliffe and the surrounding area. It has moved its global rail headquarters to London and opened a European rail research centre there, and for one primary reason: because the United Kingdom is part of the European Union. I worry about future investment in the Hitachi plant if we leave the EU.

What I am saying is not meant to be part of some "Project Fear", but as the MP for Sedgefield, which includes Newton Aycliffe, I feel that it would be irresponsible of me not to express my deeply held worries about the future of Japanese investment if we leave the EU. Those worries find their source in statements made by the chairman of Hitachi, Mr Nakanishi. In an interview with the *Financial Times* on 12 October 2013, under the headline "Hitachi president warns UK against leaving the EU", he said that he did not expect the UK to leave the EU, but that if it did,

"I would have to reconsider how to manage our railway business." In an article that he wrote for the *Financial Times* on 11 May this year, Mr Nakanishi stated:

"Britain is the centre for Hitachi's two largest overseas infrastructure projects, in rail and new nuclear power. We invested in the country as the best base for access to the entire EU market. For our manufacturing and supplies we depend on skills and parts that come from within the UK and from Europe. Take away its EU membership, and the investment case looks very different."

Some who want to see Britain leave the EU play mischief with major foreign investment and become cavalier with quotes and facts, picking only those that support the argument they wish to promote. For example, Matthew Elliott, the chief executive of Vote Leave, insinuated at the Treasury Committee's public hearing on 9 May, through selective quoting, that nothing would change with Hitachi if the UK left the EU. The recent and consistent statements of the chair of Hitachi prove that there would be repercussions for further investment in the UK if we left.

As this speech is not part of a so-called "Project Fear", I will say that if Britain votes to leave the EU on 23 June, it will not mean that the Hitachi factory in my constituency closes on 24 June. However, I am deeply concerned about its ability to generate more jobs and expand in the long term, and therefore to create economic growth both locally and nationally, if it does not have unfettered access to the EU marketplace. In a recent survey that I undertook of businesses in my constituency, more than 50% of respondents said that leaving the EU would have a negative effect on their investment plans for the future.

Christian Matheson: Is my hon. Friend aware that I made exactly the same point at a meeting of the all-party aerospace group about a large employer next to my constituency, Airbus? This is not simply about Hitachi, in his constituency; major manufacturers and their suppliers right across the UK have the same fears.

Phil Wilson: That is absolutely right. I made the specific point about Hitachi because it is based in my constituency, but it is fair to say that for a lot of foreign investors, our being part of the EU is key to their future plans.

I am disappointed that some Members are prepared to play fast and loose with the facts. The hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) was recently quoted in the *Daily Mail* as saying that big businesses

"agree with an open-border immigration policy because it means they don't, for instance, have to worry too much about us getting local people. They think they can just get a steady supply of unskilled...labour from abroad".

That is a slur on the good name of good employers such as Hitachi, which built its factory in the north-east because of the local people's skills and application to their work. Some 95% of Hitachi's workforce at Newton Aycliffe come from the north-east, and they are skilled and well paid.

Because of its commitment to the local people, Hitachi—along with Gestamp, the major employer in the town, employing 1,300 people—has sponsored a university technical college, built overlooking the Hitachi factory. UTC South Durham will have more than 60 young people passing through its doors once it opens in September, and that number will build up to 600 local teenagers, who will be equipped with the essential skills required for the world of work. That is all possible because of

Hitachi, Gestamp and Sunderland University's belief in local people, but also because we are part of the European Union.

Hitachi has written to its workforce outlining the company's position on Europe, not to bully but to inform. It is what a responsible employer does. It has made it absolutely clear that the decision on 23 June is one for the British people, but that it would be remiss of it as a responsible employer not to state its position. Some of the text of the email that Hitachi has sent its employees reads:

"Like many other international companies we invested here because of the UK's strong economic fundamentals and rich access to talent. We are also in the UK in order to have access to the entire EU and European market. In particular for our manufacturing and supplies we depend on skills and parts which come from within the UK and Europe at large.

We can understand that the EU is not perfect but the UK's departure from the EU would create huge uncertainty for all Hitachi businesses in the UK in terms of economics, trade, skills and talent, and would affect the stability that the company needs for continued investment and long-term growth.

We also believe that it would have negative impact upon the UK economy and carry significant risks for the remainder of the EU. Therefore we believe that a strong and united Europe with the UK in a single, open market offers the best conditions for Europe's prosperity, and for Hitachi's business."

The matter could not be made clearer.

Like a lot of people, I campaigned long and hard to ensure that the Government went ahead with the deal to bring Hitachi to the north-east, because of the jobs and investment that it would bring. I am not prepared to stand idly by and watch that new inward investment—not just Hitachi, but other major investors—be threatened by our leaving the EU, and that is why I will be campaigning for a remain vote on 23 June.

2.20 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The Gracious Speech has already been described as "thin" and "short on detail", and although I understand the sensitivity of the timing in relation to the EU referendum that my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgfield (Phil Wilson) mentioned, that could have been avoided if the state opening had been delayed, as Labour Members suggested.

The Government's programme falls short in a number of areas, including the provision of support to carers. There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to improve support for carers or to ensure that local authorities have the resources necessary to implement the duties that the Government placed on them in the Care Act 2014. The 2011 census shows that the number of carers increased by 11% over the previous 10 years, and the steepest rise was in those caring for 50 hours or more each week. The number of older carers is also increasing. Age UK has found that one in seven people over 80 now provides unpaid care to family and friends. In the last seven years, that number has increased by 40%, and now includes 417,000 people in their 80s.

Failure to address the needs of older carers will mean that many will find it difficult to cope with their caring responsibilities. Caroline Abrahams of Age UK stated that

"as public funding falls further and further behind the growing demand for care we worry that very old people are being expected to fill the gap. They can't do it all on their own and we shouldn't take advantage of their determination to do right by those they love."

It is wrong to presume that when budgets for adult social care are cut unpaid carers will fill the gaps, and current pressures are bringing carers closer to breaking point.

Earlier this month, Carers UK released the findings of its annual "State of Caring" report, which highlights the difficulties of providing quality services for carers against a backdrop of continued local authority cuts. It states that

"the spirit of the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014 have not become a reality for all – and carers are struggling to get the support from health and care services that they need to care, work and have a life outside caring. The survey shows evidence of public services creaking under pressure – charging is up, the right services are harder to find and vital support is cut or under threat, leaving many carers anxious about the future and their ability to continue to care."

I have raised the impact of funding cuts on the care sector in a number of debates, because social care is too easy a target for cuts. Ministers have been prepared to slash local authority budgets, leading to cuts of £4.6 billion in adult social care since 2010. The Local Government Association has estimated that the implementation of the national living wage—as the Government call it—will this year cost an additional £330 million for home care and residential care providers. In Salford, for example, the 2% social care precept—that is all the provision that the Government are making this year—will raise £1.6 million, but the cost of implementing the national minimum wage will be £2.7 million. It is easy to imagine that gap multiplied up and down the country.

Despite what Ministers say during debates and questions, there is no extra funding from the better care fund for social care this year, and only £105 million next year. Pleas were rightly made by the directors of adult social services and the Local Government Association for the Chancellor to bring forward £700 million from later years of the better care fund, to address those immediate financial pressures. Failure to do that could lead to care providers failing or walking away from publicly funded care, and that could have serious consequences for vulnerable people who rely on care services. It is unfair to think—as seems to be the view—that unpaid family carers will be able to pick up the pieces if care providers fail because of cost pressures.

Unpaid carers are already under increasing pressure because of the impact of Government policies, and one third of carers told Carers UK that they have experienced a change in the amount of care and support that they receive. Almost 60% of those reporting a change say that the amount of care and support they receive has been reduced because of cost or availability, and in some cases those cuts have been significant. One carer reported:

"The social worker who assessed my wife said all direct payments in the borough were being reduced. We discussed the needs and were advised we would be informed of any change. Without warning or notification the budget was cut by 30% immediately."

Given those facts, it is not surprising that 54% of carers surveyed felt that their quality of life will get worse over this year, despite the Care Act 2014.

The 2014 Act was supposed to entitle all carers to a timely assessment of their needs, yet one in three carers who have had an assessment in the past year had to wait six months or longer. Worryingly, nearly 40% of carers caring for someone at the end of life also had to wait six

[Barbara Keeley]

months or more for an assessment. There is no time at the end of life to be considering what a carer needs “in six months’ time”, and I urge the Minister to press Health Ministers to respond to the independent review of “Choice in end of life care”, which was published more than a year ago, and to consider a new review that would extend choice at the end of life to children and young people.

Almost a quarter of carers had to request an assessment for themselves over the last year, instead of having one offered to them as the law requires. Even when carers receive an assessment, many feel that it does not address their needs. Almost 70% of carers felt that their need to have regular breaks from caring was not considered, and 74% of working-age carers did not feel that the support needed to juggle care with work was considered sufficiently. It appears to some carers that assessment is just a listening exercise that provides no real help. As one carer reported:

“All assessment areas were considered by my assessor but due to cuts there was no support they could practically offer me. I was listened to but there was no positive outcome.”

Along with the emotional stress and physical exhaustion that can occur from providing care without enough support, many carers are finding that it has a real impact on their finances. Of the carers struggling to make ends meet, nearly half surveyed are cutting back on essentials such as food and heating. Others are borrowing money, and more than a third are using up their savings. That is clearly not sustainable in the long term.

I urge Ministers to ensure that carers have the financial support they need. Carers also need access to services to help them in their caring role, and the health and social care system should have a duty to identify carers and take meaningful action to promote their health and wellbeing. Assessments should be accessible to carers, and they should be more than a tick-box or listening exercise. They should lead to carers being provided with tangible support.

The Gracious Speech did not provide any assurance that the Government will address the funding problems that local authorities face in providing social care, which I have outlined. The move to full business rate retention by local authorities will not address the chronic underfunding of social care. As with the social care precept, the proposed financial arrangement for local government fails to consider need, and could create further inequalities in funding for social care. I am concerned that those areas where most funding is needed will be those that gain the least from business rate retention. Unless the Government outline significant changes for carers in their upcoming carers strategy, it is likely that we will continue to see higher costs for carers, and lower levels of support for them or the person they care for.

It was disappointing that the Gracious Speech failed to mention addressing the injustice experienced by women born in the 1950s who are now bearing the brunt of the changes to the state pension age. They face additional financial hardship because of the Government’s failure to provide fair transitional arrangements—an issue we have debated a number of times. The pensions Bill will do nothing to address that injustice, and I would like to outline some of the options that have been suggested.

The new Work and Pensions Secretary keeps saying that there are no viable options, but he does not appear to consider those that have been put forward. In an Opposition day debate on this issue, six options were put forward by the shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, who suggested changing the timetable to delay the pension age increase until 2020, so that it would not reach 66 until 2021, and capping the maximum state pension age increase from the Pensions Act 2011 at 12 months. He suggested keeping the qualifying age for pension credit on the previous timetable, which would help some of the women who are facing the greatest financial hardship. [Interruption.] Ministers on the Treasury Bench do not seem interested in the 2.6 million women who are suffering hardship thanks to policies that they have introduced, and it is a pity that they bother to sit here but not to listen.

The fourth option, which the Work and Pensions Committee has put forward, is for people to take a reduced state pension at an earlier age or pay a lower state pension for longer. I do not support that option but it is one that is being put around. The other option is to extend the timetable for increasing the state pension age by 18 months so that it reaches 66 by 2022. I have suggested that the Government consider a bridge pension such as that which I understand is paid in the Netherlands to women affected by the increase in the state pension age.

Andrew Gwynne: I am glad that my hon. Friend has mentioned the 1950s women, and I congratulate her on becoming chair of the all-party parliamentary group on WASPI last week. She will no doubt be aware that Labour colleagues in the Welsh Assembly have tabled a motion calling on the British Government to introduce fair transitional arrangements for these very women.

Barbara Keeley: Absolutely. I fear that we will keep coming back to this until the Government realise it is unreasonable to expect these women, who were expecting a pension at 60 but had it taken away from them, to live on nothing. I have constituents trying to live on their savings.

Christian Matheson: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Government have made the cynical calculation that most of the women affected will have reached pensionable age come the next general election and that they are hoping the problem will simply go away, even if the injustice does not?

Barbara Keeley: They might have made that calculation, but they are wrong, because over the next 10 years, as the changes are made, 2.6 million women will be affected. I think the Government will find themselves with hundreds of thousands of very angry women, as well as their family members, husbands, sisters, children and so on. The numbers ought to make Ministers take this more seriously than they appear to be doing today.

I want to finish the detail because people are interested. One bridge pension was set at around £400 a month. That is better than forcing these women, who have worked all their lives and paid national insurance contributions for 40 years, on to the Work programme, employment and support allowance or jobseeker’s allowance at 62 or 63. It is disgraceful to treat women born in the 1950s that way. And while we are discussing transport and buses, I repeat what someone wrote on social media

about the lack of concessionary travel in some parts of the country for people whose state pension age has changed. Why should there be concessionary travel at 60 in London but not in many other parts of the country? That brings further hardship.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) mentioned the all-party parliamentary group on WASPI, which I am delighted to say 120 hon. Members signed up to last week. It was formed to provide a cross-party forum in which we can hold the Government to account over the transitional arrangements to compensate the 1950s-born women affected by the changes to the state pension age and campaign on all the other issues around the state pension age. I look forward to helping the group pursue those aims and to making progress to help my constituents. I would be happy to work with Welsh Labour, too, if it is an important issue for it. I will campaign for the hundreds of thousands of 1950s-born women affected by this injustice.

I have raised issues of Government policy adversely affecting 2.6 million women in the UK and 7 million unpaid family carers. There was nothing in the Gracious Speech to help those nearly 10 million people, but I have talked about their issues. It is a pity there were no measures to help them, but we might have an opportunity to do so in the months ahead, when I hope to see extra measures.

2.33 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Yesterday we had a day of tradition, pomp, ceremony and fancy costumes, but the reality behind the Gracious Speech is that we have another year of Conservative Government.

I start by commending the Government, which is not something I often do, for the opening paragraph of Her Majesty's Gracious Speech, because it is something that all Members ought to be able to sign up to:

"My Government will use the opportunity of a strengthening economy to deliver security for working people, to increase life chances for the most disadvantaged".

I welcome that statement of intent. It is one of the things that brought me into the Labour party. I believe in social justice and fighting against inequality in whatever form it manifests itself, but I say to the Government that they will be scrutinised on the measures they bring before the House. Intentions are all fine and well, but it is on their actions that they will be judged.

I remind the Government, who speak about helping the most disadvantaged, of their actions over the past six years: the reliance of many of my constituents on food banks; the increase in tuition fees, trebled under the last coalition Government; the abolition of the education maintenance allowance, which helped so many disadvantaged young people into further education; the pernicious and evil bedroom tax, which has hurt so many families in this county; and the reduction in social security support, including for the disabled and those in low-paid work. Yes, let us try to increase the life chances of the most disadvantaged, but it is on actions not words that Ministers will be judged.

I want to talk briefly about some of the measures in the Gracious Speech. The buses Bill is long overdue, particularly in my city region of Greater Manchester, which, being one of those areas with an elected mayor,

will be able to take advantage of the measures, but I ask Ministers why the powers will be available only to areas with an elected mayor and why they should not also be available to other areas and local authorities that have problems with their bus services and want to introduce an element of control into planning a strategic transport network.

It is good news for Greater Manchester, however, because 80% of public transport use is by bus. The effects of deregulation are clear: at its peak, there were 500 million bus journeys in Greater Manchester; last year, that figure was 220 million. That shows the decline in bus usage. On car ownership, still 31% of households in Greater Manchester do not have access to a car, so bus, tram and local train travel is really important. As I say, 80% of those public transport journeys in Greater Manchester are made by bus.

Greater Manchester saw the worst of the bus wars at the height of the deregulation madness. Rather than sensible competition, with a tendering regime that allowed network areas to be planned, standards set and timetables regulated and which ensured a fair competitive process, we had the opposite—an unplanned system with competition not in a council committee room, as part of a fair and transparent planned network system, but on the roads. It was chaos and it destroyed the bus industry in Greater Manchester. I really hope, therefore, that the buses Bill will be a success and that areas that want to take on those new powers can do so.

On the subject of devolution, I also want to talk about the proposals for business rates retention. Again, this could be a success, but the Government need to tread carefully. In Greater Manchester, we have come to an understanding of what is needed in the conurbation and agreed, through the combined authority, that business rates will be pooled and shared. That is really important. If we are to make sense of the devolved settlement in Greater Manchester, we must acknowledge that not all parts of the city region are drivers of growth. We must make sure that people from across Greater Manchester have the skills, education and transport links necessary to access the jobs being created in the growth areas and that the wealth and benefits generated by those jobs are spread across the whole conurbation. That is why pooling and sharing are so necessary.

I acknowledge that my constituency is probably not one of the major areas of growth in the conurbation. That would be the city centre, around Manchester airport and airport city, Trafford park and around the Trafford centre and at Salford Quays around the media city UK. We have to make sure that the wealth generated in those areas is spread across the entire conurbation. That is why I hope the Government will ensure fair arrangements for the retention of business rates.

One of the two boroughs I represent, Tameside, is a net gainer of the current system of business rates because it is a predominantly residential borough. Most of the big industries have disappeared and not been replaced with anything like the number of companies that could generate substantial business rates. That is not to say that the borough council is not trying, but to put it in context, if we did not pool and share with the rest of Greater Manchester, Tameside would require another 17 IKEAs to be built, just to break even under the new system. That is why we have to be careful, and it is why

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we need a sensible approach with pooling and sharing across Greater Manchester that recognises the challenges I have mentioned.

I want to draw Members' attention to the part of the Gracious Speech where the Government talk about tackling

"some of the deepest social problems in society"

in order to "improve life chances". Her Majesty went on to say that

"my Government will introduce new indicators for measuring life chances."

I have to tell the Government that I am a little cynical about that. It does not matter how we look at the causes of deprivation if the measures are changed in order to give the answers that are wanted. We need to tackle poverty in a holistic way.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the idea of improving life chances is just another way of saying that the Government are scrapping poverty targets?

Andrew Gwynne: That is very much my worry, and I hope that the Government can reassure us on that. If they are not scrapping the targets, they are changing the goalposts, which is my other worry. What we really need to do is to look at the causes of poverty, deprivation and inequality and then tackle them.

That is broadly where I want to finish, but there is one missed opportunity—one that I hope the Government will come to consider in due course. If we are serious about tackling the endemic health inequalities that are prevalent, to a lesser or greater extent, in every single constituency, we must have better joined-up government. We need to break out of the silo mentality and get away from the notion that public health is solely a matter for the Department of Health. We need a national health and wellbeing strategy that every single Government Department and every single devolved institution is fully signed up to.

Let me give one example. When a Bill is introduced here or in the other place, Ministers have to certify to Members that it is compliant with two pieces of legislation: the Human Rights Act and the Equality Act 2010. But I would go further, because I believe that every piece of legislation should also be health and wellbeing compliant. In that way, Ministers will have to ask very simple questions: does this piece of legislation that I am proposing improve the health and wellbeing of the citizens of the UK? Does it reduce health inequalities for our citizens? If the answer is no, why the heck should we be legislating for it? I believe that that is the best way to pull all Ministers and all Government Departments towards the aim of tackling health inequalities in our country.

Whether we are talking about housing, planning, health, education, skills and training, leisure opportunities, open spaces, clean air and the general environment, jobs or transport, all those things, dealt with by myriad different Departments and agencies, impact on the health and wellbeing of our citizens. I would like to see much more joined-up thinking about that. I hope Ministers will take that on board, break out of the silo mentality and, once and for all, really tackle the health inequalities that are so endemic in too many parts of the United Kingdom.

2.44 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), who offered some excellent advice to the Government Front-Bench team. I hope that they will take heed of it.

The Government have a blind spot when it comes to transport and the south bank of the Humber, and there was nothing in yesterday's Gracious Speech to give much cause for optimism. We have seen delay after delay on electrifying the TransPennine route. The Office of Rail Regulation just last week rejected the proposal to create a direct rail service between Grimsby and London, but the lack of such a direct link is really holding back the area, giving a competitive advantage to comparative towns and cities in the region.

Grimsby and Cleethorpes combined have a bigger population than York, yet York has a direct service to London, with a travel time of under two hours. For people travelling to Grimsby, which is just 40 miles south of York, it takes an hour longer, and they will have to change trains. The Gracious Speech referred to pursuing space travel and trips to the moon, but to be perfectly honest, my constituents would be happy to get to Doncaster in under an hour.

There is a strong case for greater investment in transport infrastructure for the south bank of the Humber. We are a strategically important region for trade and logistics; and we are a gateway to Europe, with goods worth millions of pounds being shipped in and out of our ports every day, and then being transported across the country. Any plans for transportation in the region should recognise and consider those factors. Yet the Government's 35-page "Northern transport strategy" published earlier this year does not mention Grimsby even once.

It is not just for trade and freight purposes that our region needs greater focus from the Department for Transport. Hull will be the city of culture in 2017, but while many people cross the Humber travelling to work every day, connectivity between the south and north banks remains poor. The year 2017 could bring huge benefits to the entire Humber region, but poor transport links threaten to shut the rest of us out. There are many things that the Government could do to help ensure that that does not happen. Many fellow Humberside MPs supported my call earlier this year to suspend the tolls for the Humber bridge. The lower toll since 2012 led to a 26% increase in the use of the bridge, and brought economic and social benefits to the area. At least while Hull is the city of culture, free travel across the bridge could end it being seen as a barrier to work, leisure and trade.

The last bus service back from Hull to the south bank currently leaves at half-past 6 in the evening, so people from Grimsby are excluded from spending the evening there. With no direct rail link, and just one train after 8 o'clock, our public transport network will not allow people who do not drive, and particularly young people, to access the cultural events in Hull next year. Putting on evening bus and rail services for 2017 would be a popular move, and could even become permanent if people continued to use them.

Children from all backgrounds should be able to cross the Humber to see the performances in Hull next year—whether or not their parents can afford the tickets

and travel. I would like to see the Government support state schools in the region with a fund for free school trips to visit arts and cultural activities. Those minor steps would go a long way towards ensuring that 2017 leaves a lasting impression on the current generation, and I hope that the Transport Secretary will agree to meet me, and my fellow Humberside MPs, to discuss them.

I welcome the announcement of a Bill to change the franchising system for bus services, but I worry about what the effect on services in my constituency will be if Britain votes to leave the European Union next month. The numbers 1, 2 and 20 buses—with which I hope everyone will be familiar—are all funded by the EU. The number 1 bus is particularly important to our local economy. It goes to Europarc, Grimsby's flagship business park, which is the location for hundreds of jobs in the town, and which, as the name suggests, is also funded by the EU. If the bus were to stop running, I should be worried about the impact on businesses on the site. I should like to hear the Minister's view of the potential impact of Brexit in that context.

Let me now turn to an issue about which I have previously written to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones). Owing to a change in the lighting regulations last year, community first responders are no longer permitted to attach certain reflective markings to their vehicles. A constituent of mine who is a first responder contacted me to say that he feared that the change could put his safety at risk if he was called out to an incident on a country road, or at night, and approaching vehicles did not see him until a very late stage. He is also worried that the lack of reflective signage on his vehicle will make it harder to spot when other emergency service vehicles are attempting to locate the site of the incidents.

I want to record my thanks to the Minister for his response to my letter, and also take the opportunity to follow up a couple of the points that he made. First, he raised the prospect of an amendment to the regulation of retro-reflective Battenberg livery in the Deregulation Act 2015. I should like to hear confirmation that the Government intend to pursue that, and also to hear what the extent will be of the amendment that he suggested. Secondly, he referred to concern that attaching Battenberg livery to the vehicles of members of the public as they went about their daily business devalued the livery. Given that the point of the signage is visibility for safety purposes, I am not sure that I see why that would be such a bad thing. The Minister said there would be a consultation, and I would appreciate more information about what opportunities my constituent will have to feed into it.

I hope that the Minister will be able to respond to those points in a letter to me after the debate. I am sure that he and all Members agree that first responders do an incredibly important job. They save lives, they do it voluntarily, and they should be given all the tools that they need to do the job safely and to the best of their abilities.

2.51 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate and to follow the many speeches that have been made so far.

Today we have heard about drones, driverless cars, spaceports and space planes. That all sounds a wee bit like a sci-fi movie, but it forms the headlines of a Queen's Speech that is forward-looking when it comes to transport and infrastructure. The forward-looking, fully prepared United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland that we all need and want is taking the lead on the global stage, and making sure that we are ready to lead beyond the globe. A forward-looking Bill will secure future transport and the jobs of tomorrow that will come with it.

Not only does the Queen's Speech refer to provisions for driverless vehicles, space planes and spaceports, but we see a welcome recognition of the need to adapt the insurance market to reflect the changes that driverless vehicles will bring about. This is not just about the vehicles themselves; it is about the way in which the system will work. Autonomous vehicles could represent a safety revolution. Insurers have already been trying to shape the right framework to keep insurance simple for future drivers. I believe that this commitment could throw some of these "rocket boosters"—if I may use that terminology—behind efforts to turn the future of driving that is envisaged into a reality.

A few weeks ago, during Transport questions, I asked what moneys were being set aside for electric cars and the ministerial reply was that moneys were being disbursed throughout the United Kingdom. However, there needs to be a sea change of attitude on the high street as well. If we are to have electric cars, there will have to be better charging points on the high street, where the people are, on every garage forecourt, and in shopping centres and stores. We need a policy and a strategy that extends throughout the UK.

That said, while it is all well and good to look to the future—as indeed we should—existing problems with our infrastructure and transport sectors need to be sorted out now, rather than being left to the future. There has been that futuristic commitment to spaceports and space plans, but the Government need to keep their feet on the ground just for now and postpone take-off, because huge issues affecting airports and aeroplanes are still outstanding. For instance the Government still cannot agree on where to build a new runway in the south-east.

A recent announcement from Heathrow—supported by the Democratic Unionist party, which is committed to Heathrow 3—shows that it is willing not only to meet the requirements set by the Independent Aviation Noise Authority, but to go even further. Surely the process of securing the future of the country's premier airport is just as important to our future, in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom, as ensuring that we are in a position to harness future transport means. For us, with Belfast City and Belfast Aldergrove, Heathrow is an international airport that gives us connectivity to the rest of the world, and the development would also help our economy to grow. There has been no mention of air passenger duty, but it would have been nice to see something about that. In the past week or two, we have heard—this does not affect my constituency, but it is good to recognise it—that we will have more direct flights from China to Manchester, and some Members will obviously speak to that. The boost that that will

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give to the economy will be £230 million, so we must get connectivity right and make sure we benefit across the whole United Kingdom.

One of those writing today about the Queen's Speech said:

"While there was praise for the futuristic vision, there were complaints that the government's programme made no mention of the long-awaited expansion of airports in the southeast... 'The business community will be surprised that the Queen's Speech included a commitment to build a new spaceport but there was no commitment to make a final decision on a new runway for more conventional aircraft,' Gavin Hayes, director of the airport campaign group Let Britain Fly, said. 'We are urging government to make a final decision by the summer recess.'"

I also urge them to do that. Let us have this decision made once and for all.

Every Member who has spoken so far has referred to the bus services Bill, which is most welcome—I thank the Government for it. However, we need to see that commitment turned into action. We had the same commitment last year, but we have yet to see it delivered on. The Bill is an opportunity to make a real difference at ground level, allowing powers over bus services to lie with those people closest to the operation of services. Talking buses are also an exciting prospect. If they are implemented properly and become widely available, they will be a great way of making a difference to vulnerable people—those in society we have a duty to support and help.

On spaceports, we face competition from over 20 rivals, including the United Arab Emirates, Spain and Australia, so the Government are right to take that into account by committing to spaceports. A Bill will pave the way to our seeing spaceports built by 2018. However, as with the bus services Bill, we need the vision to become a reality and to be delivered.

I want to make a quick comment about drones, because they are also part of infrastructure. We need better monitoring, regulation and control of drones. We need to make sure they are used correctly. Like many things in this world, if they are used correctly, they can benefit us all, but when they are used in a dangerous fashion and for the wrong reasons—for instance to deliver drugs, mobile phones, money and contraband over the walls of jails—something is wrong. If they are used dangerously around airports, we also have to control them. When it comes to drones, let us have a wee bit more detail about how things will work.

Infrastructure does not mean just transport. The Government are in danger of moving on to the next phase of infrastructure advancement without finishing the implementation of the last great advancement—the internet. My constituency, like those of many hon. Members in the Chamber, does not have proper access to broadband just yet. The commitment to fast broadband nationwide has been a long-standing one, but one that, moving towards 2020, still has to be delivered.

The fact that every UK household is to have a legal right under the universal service obligation to a fast broadband connection is welcome but, again, it will have to become a reality. For too long, I have had literally hundreds of constituents contacting me every week about their broadband connection. The issue of broadband has been brought up in the House, in questions

and in Westminster Hall. Some 13% of my constituents cannot get broadband. People want to grow their business and to employ extra people, but they do not have broadband. The Government committed some money to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland a while ago, but it has now run out. It is time that we had a concrete, strategic plan on paper to show how we are going to reach the 100%, which is something that I certainly want to happen in my constituency.

I am pleased about the Government's commitment to 1 million houses; I will be interested to see how that works. Again, however, it is important that we put that commitment in place. I make a plea for social housing and for us to make sure that people have the opportunity to acquire property for a rent or a mortgage that they can afford.

I have laboured the issue of infrastructure so, to conclude, I would like to touch on a couple of other issues. We have a commitment to the infamous sugar tax—I totally support and welcome it—or rather to the soon-to-be-famous sugar tax, once this great nation reaps the inevitable benefits of this long-overdue measure. There may have been some controversy about the issue, but when it comes to the facts and those who are affected, it is clear which side those who want to make a positive difference are on. Some of my colleagues who sit alongside me—they are not here today—have a different opinion, but I am pleased that the Government are committing themselves to dealing with the issue.

From obesity networks to sports clubs and cancer charities, all the stakeholders we would want to be onside are in the right place on this measure. This move is not a magic wand, and many people look at it and say, "What is it going to do?" It cannot do everything by itself, but it is a good step towards tackling the nationwide obesity epidemic and reducing the risk of the many diseases associated with obesity. The debate around this issue has been met with some cynicism and opposition, but we have to commit ourselves to the measure, and I am pleased that the Government have done so.

As we approach June, no contribution would be complete without a mandatory opinion about the European Union. It will be of no surprise to hon. Members that I am in the out camp. The Government have tried to keep this one even quieter than usual this year—perhaps that is why the Queen's Speech was a wee bit low key—no doubt to ensure that their abject failure on renegotiation is put as far to the back of the nation's mind as possible. There was no mention of the much-lauded sovereignty Bill—it is now quite clear that that will be scrapped. The will of the House would have shown the British people just how much of a success the Prime Minister's charade of a negotiation was. Where was the negotiation for the fishermen? Where was the negotiation for the farmers? Time will tell where we will be on 23 June, or when the result is made available on 24 June.

Furthermore, the silence is accompanied with desperation, as tight restrictions are to be imposed on visitors using the NHS, with less free healthcare access for EEA visitors. In reality, we all know that such a move will have little or no impact, and will result in little or no saving. All it does is to show the level of the Prime Minister's desperation with respect to what he is willing to undertake to keep the European project on the road. Playing immigration politics with health is the latest in

a long list of insults to the intelligence and decency of the British people. The Prime Minister might have had a good deep breath of the scuba gas, but he must be careful when he resurfaces after the referendum. We all know that resurfacing from such depths is extremely dangerous, and we are not sure what state of mind he will be in when it is all over.

I am pleased that the Government will introduce an adoption Bill to speed up the system and reduce delays. I am also pleased about the Bill on reforming prisons, but I have to say that we can build nice new prisons and give prisoners all the accommodation we like, but that will do no good if we do not address neo-Nazism and radical Islamism in prisons, where people are being radicalised before they come out. Perhaps at some stage we will find out what is going to happen about that.

The military covenant, and Northern Ireland's full involvement in it, is something that I also wish to see. I look forward to the state visit of the President of Colombia in November. That is important because we in Northern Ireland have a peace process that has worked, and it is good to see that peace is at least resembling some sort of normality in Colombia. We welcome that, and we look forward to seeing it continue. We also look forward to the Government working, as the last paragraph of the Queen's Speech states,

"in Northern Ireland to secure further progress in implementing the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements."

The DUP is committed to the Stormont House agreement and fully committed to the peace process. Our election results, with Arlene Foster becoming First Minister, are an indication of that. We believe in the democratic process, and the people of Northern Ireland will be the greater for supporting the partnership and the political system as we move forward.

3.2 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I want briefly to comment on the words of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and I echo the sentiments he expressed about the visit of the President of Colombia. I pay tribute to Members from all parts of the Northern Ireland Assembly who have played a role in the Colombian peace process based on their own experience. Hon. Members in this House can be proud of the role that our colleagues from Northern Ireland have played in making the peace process as successful as it has been so far.

I welcome those parts of the Gracious Speech that we are able to support, particularly those that have been purloined so successfully from the manifesto on which I stood for election just one year ago. I am really pleased that the Government will be proceeding with the infrastructure commission. I am also pleased to welcome the measures in the buses Bill, although I was concerned to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) about the restrictions that the Government seem to be imposing.

The ability to regulate bus services will be extended only to those areas where the Government have decided that there will be an elected Mayor. Perhaps the Minister for Housing and Planning might convey my concerns to the Secretary of State and his fellow Ministers in the Department for Communities and Local Government about the fact that the Government say that they do not

have a one-size-fits-all policy but proceed with one anyway. It would seem that they will require Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East and Warrington to adopt a mayoral structure in an area that, frankly, is not suitable for it. The requirement comes with a carrot and a stick, and there will be no carrot unless we take on an elected Mayor. That is wrong for the area I represent, and I ask the Minister to bear that point in mind and take it back to his colleagues.

I welcome the moves to improve the infrastructure for electric vehicles. Following a question asked by the hon. Member for Strangford a couple of weeks ago, I made the point that infrastructure includes knowledge infrastructure. Electric vehicles are entirely different from those that use petrol or diesel. I urge Transport Ministers to consider very carefully the proposals of the Institute of the Motor Industry about providing a training and certification programme for automotive engineers so that they are aware of the dangers that electric vehicles pose to those who work in the industry and are properly trained to deal with electric engines.

On transport infrastructure, Her Majesty said that the Government would continue to support the development of the so-called northern powerhouse. I suspect that the northern powerhouse is little more than a sham—a slogan to distract from the fact that the substance is entirely lacking. I congratulate the Government on their sloganising because it has got us all talking about the northern powerhouse, rather than examining its substance. The northern powerhouse has almost become an accepted reality, which displays their mastery of distraction.

London is getting Crossrail and will now get Crossrail 2, as well as another runway. I confess that I do not have a dog in the fight when it comes to where the new runway in the south-east should be, except that I suspect it should be at Heathrow, if only because that option is least far away from the rest of the country. However, I am concerned that infrastructure development is seen merely as an extension of London infrastructure. I have always supported HS2 and I would support HS3, HS4 and HS5, because I believe infrastructure investment should be just that: investment that brings a return in the shape of jobs and prosperity. I have to say that before I became a Member I always wanted HS2 to be built from the north to the south. I fear all we will get is a London to Birmingham fast railway line, which will do little to encourage growth north of Birmingham. If so, we in the north-west of England in particular will become part of a client region of London, feeding off the scraps of London's economic growth, rather than developing our own.

I was very concerned to hear the Secretary of State for Transport talk about HSBC transferring jobs to Birmingham as though that was something to be proud of. That will not be good for the people in London, but, more importantly, it will detract from the whole point, which is that infrastructure development should generate economic growth of its own, not simply shift growth around or across the country.

As other hon. Members have said, the danger is that the Treasury is threatening to take over the HS2 project and to trim it back so that none of the benefits originally promised will be delivered for the north-west.

Andrew Gwynne: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Christian Matheson: I would always give way to my good friend from Denton and Reddish.

Andrew Gwynne: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. There is some suggestion that, in the trimming back process, the HS2 station at Manchester airport might be dropped. Does he agree that that would be incredibly short-sighted? This is about having a high-speed rail link to the airport running not just from north to south, but—with HS3—from east to west. The airport station ought to be a hub, which would provide new links not just from the north-east right through to Manchester airport, but to Chester and beyond in the other direction.

Christian Matheson: What an excellent point. We used to talk about an integrated transport policy with a few local buses and a couple of local railway services. My hon. Friend has identified an integrated transport policy that includes international transport as well, and he made that case very eloquently.

The Secretary of State talks about HS2 having an impact, as I am sure it is, but the danger is that, because of the uncertainty, it will be a negative impact. To some extent, we are seeing that in the north-west, where investment decisions have been delayed until we find out exactly what will be proposed. If the Government are really serious about the northern powerhouse, they should put a stop to the anonymous briefings and the newspaper speculation, and commit to HS2 in a way that benefits the whole of the north, along the lines described by my hon. Friend. I do not want to see HS2 simply as a new line painted on Harry Beck's London underground map, making the midlands an extension of London. That means making a reality of Sir David Higgins's vision of a true northern rail hub at Crewe, with at least seven HS2 trains an hour stopping there to provide the great connections to the rest of Cheshire, Warrington and beyond, and a commitment to run some trains direct from HS2 to Chester—of course—and north Wales, some of which could make up those seven trains. We need to make sure that it is not just people living close to the stations who benefit from the £40 billion that the Government will invest in HS2. Local roads and railways must be built that allow my constituents and those of all other right hon. and hon. Members in Cheshire and Warrington—including, of course, the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne)—to take advantage of the new services quickly and easily.

I understand that capacity is a fundamental driver of HS2, but so are reliability and speed. If HS2 above Birmingham is simply designed to link the centres of the major cities—London, Birmingham and Manchester, and perhaps not even Liverpool or Glasgow—it will do more damage than it saves, by sucking investment and economic growth out of areas, such as mine, seen as being on the periphery and preventing them from taking full advantage. They will lose out to the big cities. I warn Ministers that the Government risk snatching defeat from the jaws of victory by making the false and incorrect predictions of the doomsayers who opposed HS2 come true through their own myopia and the catastrophic mistake of allowing the Treasury to take over the project—not to achieve the careful cost management that we all know has to take place, but to slash and burn on investment in services to Chester and north Wales, such as cutting out the hub at Crewe and

the Manchester airport option, as mentioned by my hon. Friend. All those options would generate the returns demanded by that investment. The Chester, west Cheshire and north Wales cross-border economic area is one of the fastest growing in the UK. If the Government want to pull the plug on that, it is easy: just cancel the northern HS2 hub at Crewe.

If I return briefly to the matter of road transport, the Minister will know exactly where I am going. The M56 in my area is desperately in need of an upgrade to deal with the impossible congestion that drivers experience on a daily basis, but the need for investment goes far beyond this. I remain desperately disappointed that no action is planned by the Government before 2020. I remind the Minister that this is a cross-party campaign. My next-door neighbour, the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), is leading the campaign and has support from across the parties because of the importance of the motorway for my area and as a principal artery into north Wales and parts of Merseyside. Unless the Government commit to that work now, they will stifle further economic growth in that area. If I were being cynical, I might predict that the Government will make a promise to upgrade the motorway just before the 2020 election, but such a promise will be taken with the same scepticism as befits any of their promises after the collapse of their £38 billion pledge to upgrade the railways immediately after the 2015 election.

The local authorities and the local enterprise partnership in my area are clear about where investment is needed if their ambitious plans to double the size of our economy are to be delivered, and the Government need to commit to supporting those. Transport infrastructure does not come cheap, and in calling for the electrification of the Crewe to Chester to north Wales line, to link up with a new HS2 hub at Crewe, and an upgrade of the M56, I am calling for cash spending which requires prioritisation. But investment must be considered as just that: investment to generate economic growth. It is not like sticking a pin in a bet on the grand national. My area has proved its ability to grow. The local enterprise partnership has proved its ability to work with local authorities across the political spectrum to deliver that growth and bring in businesses from across the sectors to work together to achieve that growth potential. If the Government are willing to waste £70 million on an unnecessary vanity garden bridge across the Thames in London, surely they can recognise that HS2, as a national project, must benefit the whole of the nation and allow the whole of the nation to grow under its own enterprise. They should not just consider London to be the sole driver of economic growth in the UK. For all the sloganising about a so-called northern powerhouse, without the correct infrastructure in place, it seems that crumbs from London's table will be all that we can get.

3.15 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): At a time of major economic challenges, it has become painfully obvious that Her Majesty needs a new scriptwriter who can add a bit more substance to the Gracious Speech. As I read the 21 Bills mentioned, I thought, until a short time ago, that this was simply a stalled Government awaiting the results of the European referendum. However, I listened to the Leader of the House this morning who indicated that these 21 Bills

would mean the full accomplishment of the Tory manifesto—after only two years. We have a threadbare Queen’s Speech, with no future plans, and it would appear that a period of long-term economic misery awaits many people. We should be addressing the chronic UK productivity problem, a matter that is not even mentioned in the Queen’s Speech, where the word “productivity” does not appear.

Before I address some issues of transport and infrastructure, I would like to discuss an anti-terrorism matter connected with future initiatives, and I wish to give some praise to the Government. Some weeks ago I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill on establishing standards for forensic linguistic analysts—people who can analyse text messages and help identify some of the most dangerous people in our society. Although the Bill has fallen, I am pleased to say that the Government have agreed to a meeting with me to discuss whether this is something they could take up in the future, and I am very grateful for that.

Of the measures in the Gracious Speech, I welcome some of the moves on transport, and I wish to comment briefly on a couple of those areas. First, when the Government consider the buses Bill, I ask them to remember, among other things, the needs of students, particularly those in rural areas who attend college. The National Union of Students has already pointed out that it considers this to be one of the major barriers to some students engaging. I hope the Government will consider that, and perhaps it would be a good idea to engage soon in deep conversations with the NUS to address the issue.

I also wish to address an issue raised by the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), who mentioned not only the great cause that many of us share in the WASPI campaign, on whose behalf she has done some outstanding work, but concessionary travel schemes, which are very important for women and men who are of or nearing retirement age. If I recall correctly, she said there were inequalities in England, in that in London it is possible to engage in these schemes at 60 but elsewhere in England the relevant age is already 63 for women, with the prospect of that rising. May I recommend that the Government think about the very simple solution adopted by the Scottish Government of having a flat-rate entry common for women and men at the age of 60 for concessionary travel? The difference that has made to the lives of large numbers of women and men over the age of 60 in Scotland has been remarkable. Other Members have talked about the importance of health and wellbeing in our society, and a measure such as this would command the support of the whole House.

Barbara Keeley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. He makes the good suggestion that the Government adopt the London model, whereby men and women have concessionary travel at 60. I met some WASPI women from Derbyshire last week here in the House. One of them was telling me that she no longer went out with a group of people who were her friends before, because she is still working, cannot afford the fares and has not got a concessionary bus pass, whereas they are retired with their pensions and concessionary travel. How unfair to divide friends in that way.

Roger Mullin: Absolutely. That adds to my point about how this is about not merely the simple issue of travel, but people’s health and wellbeing and their ability to engage with their friends, to engage in the community and to contribute more to the life of that community.

Drew Hendry: It is worth underlining the mental health benefits of concessionary travel. The scourge of loneliness comes with an ageing population and more people being isolated, and the ability to get out and travel on the bus network and to socialise is a real boon. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is something we should foster and encourage to reduce that scourge of loneliness?

Roger Mullin: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, perhaps the Government could consider making their disabled companion programme for those on disability benefits a national programme, not something available only on a regional basis. That would bring it into line with what is happening Scotland. It is of great benefit to people who otherwise face considerable disadvantages.

I am aware of the time, but I wish to mention something that concerns me greatly about the Government’s infrastructure plans. I have to say that the way in which some of them have been undertaken leaves a lot to be desired, particularly when it comes to how some so-called major national infrastructure projects are being funded and managed. I wish to highlight what some might consider to be the financial shenanigans that are going on in relation to the Thames Tideway Tunnel project. The funding model of this rather controversial multi-billion pound project comprises conventional equity—made up of about 40% pure equity and 60% subordinated debt with interest tax deductible—and medium-term bank debt to be refinanced with bonds issued over the six-year build period. However, if market conditions prevent bonds being issued, the UK Government provide a £500 million loan facility as contingent support. The liability associated with the £500 million support is unrecorded in UK Government accounts. This Parliament has never been informed of the details of this type of contingent support. It is a dodge. It exposes customers, and it should be thoroughly examined by this House. We need to have proper methods of financial management of major infrastructure projects.

My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) mentioned the Queensferry Crossing—the new bridge being built across the Forth—which is very close to my constituency. Using the new Scottish Futures Trust, which was developed when we got rid of the horrendous private finance initiative, this major new bridge is coming in quicker than planned and £1 billion under budget. How many other major infrastructure projects in the UK have come in quicker than planned and significantly under budget? The answer is very few. Perhaps we should look again at the Scottish Futures Trust model of investment.

We face many transportation and infrastructure challenges in this country, but, above all, we face major productivity and economic challenges. They should have all featured much more strongly in this Queen’s Speech. We need to focus on them not just for our benefit but for that of future generations.

3.24 pm

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I was eager to speak today on transport because I believe that there is arguably no more potent policy lever in the hands of Government that has the capacity to drive increased economic prosperity than that of improving transport. Transport is a policy area that requires Government action more than any other. Infrastructure projects begin to deliver payback only over the longer term and, in the case of railways, decades. With that time horizon, business finds such projects difficult to finance, but the payback, which includes more jobs, increased housing and a more diverse and knowledge-intensive business sector, is critical to the continued prosperity of our country.

Importantly, not only politicians but business people believe this. Business requires Government to step up, show leadership, and signal their commitment to helping our business community to deliver what we all agree it is best able to deliver—increasing prosperity throughout this country.

Unfortunately, I fear that my constituents and the constituents of so many of my right hon. and hon. Friends will find little comfort in the measures announced in the Queen's Speech. As this House knows all too well, this Government are fond of grand announcements, backed by even grander rhetoric. And no area of Government policy is blessed with grander rhetoric than transport. We hear much about sea changes and renaissances from the other side of the House. A case in point is the northern powerhouse, and more recently, its close relative, High Speed 3. These so-called powerhouse projects both promise, we have been told, a renewed industrial revolution in the heartlands of the north. As you can imagine, Madam Deputy Speaker, as an MP who proudly represents the city of Bradford, I was keen to hear more about how this Government intend to invest in improved regional transport, whether railways, buses, roads, or indeed air, to help to rekindle an economic renaissance in my city. I was hopeful that I would be able to offer a debt of gratitude to this Government for investing in the city of Bradford, helping my constituents to realise their potential. But in reality little has emerged from this Government's Queen's Speech, other than further confirmation that the Government's term of office is going to be marked by a roll-call of broken promises and a litany of excuses.

Despite six years of the so-called northern powerhouse, the only realities felt by my home city of Bradford, and by my constituents, have been bruising Government cuts and a continued concentration of wealth, economic activity and capital investment in London and the south-east of England. Until I and other northern MPs hounded the Government into an embarrassing U-turn, we faced a broken promise about the trans-Pennine electrification project. This has now been reinstated, albeit with a much less ambitious delivery date.

By most measures, Bradford is one of the UK's strongest players. It is the fifth largest local authority in Great Britain, with a growing population of over 528,000. It benefits from having the youngest population of any city in the UK, with 23.5% of the population under 16 years of age, compared with 18.8% nationally. In

10 years' time the population is expected to increase to 569,000, with its working age population forecast to rise by 24,000 to 353,000.

Bradford's economy is valued at £9.2 billion, the 11th largest in the UK. The city is home to a number of major companies, including Morrisons, Yorkshire Building Society, Princes, Santander, Provident Financial, Pace plc and Hallmark cards. In total, 17,000 businesses call the district of Bradford their home, providing much valued employment to over 195,000 people. But despite these figures, Bradford continues to be shackled by poor connectivity. This poor connectivity is especially glaring when we take the time to consider the city's regional rail links. Unlike comparators, both nationally and internationally, it has few direct services to other major regional cities. For example, and most shockingly, Bradford has no direct rail services to Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle, Hull or Manchester airport. Where Bradford does have a direct service to major regional cities such as Manchester, the average speed of the journey is a derisory 33 miles per hour.

A further indictment is the poor regional rail link with Bradford's neighbouring city, Leeds. Currently 45,000 workers commute between Leeds and Bradford on a daily basis, the largest flow between any two major cities in the UK. Despite the two city centres being only 8 miles apart, three quarters of those journeys are made by car rather than by public transport—an unbelievable figure.

As many will recall, since being elected to this House I have reserved my precious few opportunities to question the Prime Minister directly for the subject of regional rail improvement. I first asked about the Government's broken promise on trans-Pennine electrification. My second question, asked only a few weeks ago, was on electrification of the Calder Valley line, because of the key role it promises to play in HS3 and Bradford's connectivity.

My constituents might have hoped that the Prime Minister and his Government would take the opportunity offered by the Queen's Speech to bring forward proposals to improve rail connectivity between Bradford and its neighbouring major cities. The northern powerhouse and HS3 promise no increased regional connectivity for Bradford. For a city the size of Bradford, with an economy valued at £9.2 billion, the 11th largest in the UK, to be notable by its absence from one of the Government's flagship infrastructure projects is a stark and disturbing oversight. There was an opportunity in this Queen's Speech to put right that error and to announce measures to better connect a vital cog in this country's engine room of growth. It is a shame that this Government have chosen not to take that opportunity.

3.31 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): What an extraordinary waste of time! I counted 42 announcements in the Queen's Speech and only four had not been announced before yesterday. This is a Queen's Speech that risks being a waste of the Queen's time, the people's time and Parliament's time. I cannot recall in 19 years in this House seeing a Queen's Speech debate in which the speeches from the Government Back Benches numbered two and ran out before we got a third of the way into the debate, and those Benches were entirely empty for the rest of the debate.

Headline measures in legislation for this year are little more than a middle manager's task list for the next month: more control over budgets for prison governors; stop radical preachers from taking jobs in elderly care homes; longer school days; more NHS charging for non-EU citizens; money for school sport from a levy on fizzy drinks. I ask you, Mr Deputy Speaker! This is the "So what?" Queen's Speech—minimal, managerial, marking time; minor policy changes hugely overblown and hugely over-briefed to the Minister.

What was not a waste of time was the speech from the shadow Transport Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), and many of the speeches made this afternoon by hon. Members on both sides. My hon. Friend warned the Secretary of State for Transport, who is again not in his place on the Treasury Bench, about the gap between what this Government do and what this Government say. She welcomed the buses Bill, which has received wide support in the House this afternoon, including from the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett), my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—who also referred to this as the sci-fi Queen's Speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) also talked about how valuable the buses Bill is, and I think the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg), who is no longer here, might have said that, too. Although they welcomed the Bill, my hon. Friends the Member for Nottingham South and for Denton and Reddish both questioned why it was only for areas with elected mayors. We want other mayors to get the same powers in the same way as the Bill goes through this House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South took the Government to task for the lack of response to the Law Commission's report and the lack of a taxi licensing Bill. We want the system to be tightened up so that drivers who are rightly and properly rejected for a licence in their own area cannot sidestep the bar by getting a licence in another area. Above all, my hon. Friend took the Secretary of State to task for the continuing delay regarding any decision on airport expansion, particularly on the runway at Heathrow.

My hon. Friend was strongly backed by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), with the authority that she brings as the Chair of the Transport Committee, by the hon. Members for Bath, for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) and for Strangford, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), who said that the big absence from the Queen's Speech was any announcement on airports and on Heathrow. He described such an announcement as long overdue and rightly reminded the Government of all the groundwork done by the Labour Government—a White Paper on aviation in 2003 and the decision in 2008 on the expansion of Heathrow, but nothing since.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse went on to talk about housing and the damage that the Housing and Planning Act 2016, which has just reached the statute book, will bring—

Jim Fitzpatrick: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

John Healey: Let me finish my comments on my hon. Friend's speech, then I will give way to him.

My hon. Friend went on to speak about leasehold reform. He is one of the champions of leasehold reform in the House. I was glad to hear that the Minister for Housing and Planning is now taking an interest. For too long, under Governments of both parties, leasehold reform has been put in the "too difficult to do" box. To the extent that the Minister is willing to act on leasehold reform, we are willing to support him where we can.

Jim Fitzpatrick: Because of time constraints, I was not able to point out our belief that the Government's housing record is not very good. Notwithstanding the claim that they have a better house building record than we had when we were in power, they are taking credit for things that we paid for and put in the planning process before they even came to office.

John Healey: It will not surprise my hon. Friend to know that I will come on to that. He is right. We sometimes hear the Government say that they have built more social homes than we did, but 90% of the social homes built by this Government were commissioned by the Labour Government and largely funded by the Labour Government. I should know—I was the Minister who did it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) made a strong case for lower tolls on the Humber bridge. Existing tolls, she said, were a barrier not just to work and to trade, but to leisure. I am pleased to see the Secretary of State for Transport on the Front Bench. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby asked whether he would be prepared to meet her and other MPs from the area to discuss how the barriers that transport creates—especially barriers to leisure for young and older people, as well as to their work and trade—could be overcome. The Secretary of State is nodding, which is a good sign. I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend that that meeting will go ahead shortly.

One thing that my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish always brings to debate is passion and principle. I love the way he speaks. He rightly said that intentions were well and good, but it is in actions that people will judge this Government. It is fine to talk of social justice, increased life chances and reducing inequality, but we look to the actions for proof that the Government mean what they say and do as they say. As my hon. Friend said, when we look at the scrapping of the education maintenance allowance, the introduction of the bedroom tax, and the cutting of benefit support to disabled people and to people working hard on low incomes, all the signs from the past six years point in the opposite direction.

My hon. Friend described this Queen's Speech as a missed opportunity. I thought he made an interesting argument, which he could perhaps take up with the Procedure Committee, about whether, as one of the consistent systematic checks that this House applies to any new legislation, we could assess its impact on national health and wellbeing.

Over the years that I have known her there has been no more consistent, forceful or better champion of older people than my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley). She gave the House the extraordinary statistic that one in three carers now has to wait six months to get an assessment

[John Healey]

of their needs, never mind get those needs met. As she rightly said, the £4.6 billion cuts to adult social care since 2010 are a big part of that story, and there is nothing in this Queen's Speech to reassure people concerned about this that the essential funding is in place. She also noted that there is no pensions Bill to deal with the problems of the 2.6 million older women who have been hit so hard by the recent pension changes.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin), who has left the Chamber, argued that it might be helpful to adopt the Scottish model—or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South pointed out, the London model—for concessionary travel.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) rightly reminded the House that business demands better infrastructure. A city as big as Bradford, as rich in business history and business innovation, as it now is, is being badly let down by the quality of the investment and transport infrastructure to support it. As she said, grand rhetoric is what we get from Government while real change, real investment and real improvement falls so far short of that, and people in her city, businesses and residents alike, will find little comfort in the Queen's Speech announcements.

I liked the argument that my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) made when he reminded the House and Ministers that we require intellectual infrastructure as well as hard building and capital projects. He urged a training and certification programme for, for instance, engineers involved in the development of electric vehicles and in the electric infrastructure to support those vehicles. He expressed a fear shared by me and many colleagues in Yorkshire and Humber that HS2 will simply mean faster rail journeys between London and Birmingham, and the north-west will be left out. The Secretary of State said nothing to reassure the House about the plans or promises on HS2 being delivered in full.

The Secretary of State talked about UK infrastructure and, with a flourish, picked two dates, he said, at random—1997 and 2010. In 2010, Labour's last year in government, public sector net investment—or infrastructure investment from Government—was 3.4% of GDP. One year later, in the first year of the previous Parliament, after the Chancellor made his cuts, it was down to 2.8%. By the end of that Parliament, it was 1.9% of GDP. This year, it is 1.9%. By the end of this Parliament, it will be 1.5%. That is the reality between the great rhetoric that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South talked about and the actions, investment and long-term commitments we see from this Government. Housing investment—part of the picture—was slashed by 60% in 2010, the first year of the previous Government. In the same year, roads investment was slashed by £4 billion. The renewables obligation—Labour's renewables obligation, which was creating the funding to invest in green energy—was removed entirely. That is the reality of what happens when the Government do, rather than talk about, infrastructure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) spoke about why this sort of investment is so important—why it is more than simply figures and argy-bargy in this House. He talked about Hitachi in his

constituency, and the huge number of jobs and a big boost to growth in that region because of the investment in our rail system and in the rolling stock required to upgrade it.

It is that sort of impact, on all parts of the country, that makes infrastructure investment more than simply a matter of political and policy debate. It has a real impact when we get it right in areas all across the country. Instead of that investment in Britain's future, the Chancellor and Conservative Ministers have, from 2010 onwards, cut investment that would secure our place in the world, stronger long-term growth and the future welfare of our citizens.

The Transport Secretary told us at the beginning of the debate—I have checked this—that yesterday's Queen's Speech was “all about building a stronger, more resilient, more modern economy”. I have to say, however, that after six years of failure, it is clear that the Government are doing no such thing. It is clear that the Chancellor did not fix our economic foundations after the global crash. Any right wing, hard-line Finance Minister can cut public spending, but he is dodging the really tough decisions that he himself promised to take in 2010.

Rather than helping British businesses to sell to the world, our UK trade gap was a record £96 billion in the red last year, which is the biggest ever deficit since records began in 1948. Rather than reforming the finance sector and rebuilding our production base, the number of manufacturing jobs in this country is still almost 10% below that before the global crisis and crash. Rather than rebalancing the economy away from borrowing, debt and household consumption, it is now forecast that household debt will top pre-crash levels and reach 160% of income by the end of this Parliament.

The six years of failure on the economy will be unaffected by many of the measures in the Queen's Speech. There have also been six years of failure on housing. After 2 million more homes were built and 1 million more households became homeowners under Labour, we have seen failure on all fronts since 2010. When this Queen's Speech needed direction on housing and planning, we got more of the same.

The effects of six years of failure include 200,000 fewer homeowners in this country. A third of a million fewer under-35s—young people—are able to own their own home than when the Prime Minister took over in 2010. The number of families accepted as homeless has risen by a third in the past six years. Rough sleeping has doubled and is up by a third in the past year alone. Last year, as my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse said, fewer affordable homes were built than at any time in more than two decades, and the housing benefit bill rose by £2 billion in real terms over the course of the last Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee took the Housing and Planning Minister to task over his target of 1 million homes. He made the strong argument—this was echoed by the hon. Member for Strangford—that social housing, new social housing and affordable housing to rent as well as to buy must be part of the picture. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown)—he is not in the Chamber, so I will not mention him again—made a similar point.

Yesterday the sovereign said in the other place:

“My Government will support aspiration and promote home ownership through its commitment to build a million new homes.” The Housing and Planning Minister sometimes plays fast and loose with the figures. It is not possible to house people in planning permissions or to live in a start. It is building new homes that counts, and if he is to build 1 million new homes in this Parliament, he will have to do a great deal better than what we have seen over the past six years.

There were fewer new homes built in the last Parliament than under any peacetime Government since the 1920s. Even in the latest full year, 2015, the number of new homes built was still far below where it needs to be—a total of just 143,000. By the way, that is still 24% below the peak during Labour’s 13 years in office. Because growth in new house building has been so sluggish under this Government—astonishingly, it has been only 2% on average since 2010—if they do not improve that run rate, they will not hit their target until 2033.

Some of the best policies are bigger than party politics and capable of commanding a broad consensus, such as Bank of England independence, the national planning Act for major infrastructure projects and the localisation of council housing finance. Under the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill, there is a welcome commitment to put the National Infrastructure Commission on a statutory footing. Like the commission itself, that was a recommendation made in Labour’s Armit review in the previous Parliament, so we are pleased that the Government have taken it up. We look forward to seeing what further compulsory purchase powers the Government introduce in that Bill. Labour’s Lyons review in the previous Parliament recommended updating legislation on compulsory purchase orders to streamline and simplify the relevant powers and to enable CPOs to be secured at closer to existing use value. I hope that those suggestions will be in the Bill, because they will be among the tests that we use in considering it.

We will, however, oppose the privatisation of the public Land Registry, which will undermine the trust of homeowners, mortgage lenders and solicitors, and put at risk the essential neutrality, quality and transparency that the Land Registry offers. It will be a gift to tax evaders and avoiders. I remind the House that the Land Registry returned a profit of £100 million to the taxpayer in 2012-13 and has delivered a surplus to the taxpayer and the Treasury in 19 of the past 20 years. It is a public asset that makes money for the public purse, and we should keep it that way.

The deeper truth about this Queen’s Speech is a Conservative party riven over Europe and too divided to prepare a serious legislative programme that even tries to get to grips with the country’s problems. It is a Queen’s Speech for a quiet life in No. 10 Downing Street. It confirms a Prime Minister past his sell-by date. As the former Work and Pensions Secretary said when he walked out of the Government, policies are “distinctly political rather than in the national economic interest.” This is a Government who worry more about political message than policy substance, and who are more concerned to fix headlines than the housing crisis, the elderly care crisis, the crisis in wages for working people, or the crisis of low investment, productivity, skills and exports. Never mind one nation; this is a Government and a Queen’s Speech that are failing the nation.

3.53 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): It is my great pleasure to deliver the closing remarks in today’s debate. It is also nice to see the shadow Housing Minister in the Chamber, taking an interest. Given his absence throughout much of our deliberations on the Housing and Planning Act 2016 in the previous Session, I wondered where he had got to.

Happily, there has been no back seat for the Government’s agenda on local growth. Ministers in the Department for Communities and Local Government continue to play a prominent part in the debates that follow each Queen’s Speech, Budget and autumn statement, because local growth remains central to everything that the Government do. The right hon. Gentleman might be used to listening to Labour speeches that are full of high words and no action, but we are clearly focused on ensuring that we deliver for our country, and that is what this Gracious Speech is about.

Another thing that never changes is the shadow Housing Minister himself. He goes back to his old lines that he has used before, forgetting to mention that he was the Minister who oversaw the lowest level of house building that this country has seen since 1923, at just 88,000 homes in a year. He is rather like a fleetingly successful popstar of yesteryear—he cannot help but sing the same tune over and over again. Well, he is welcome to keep his record of boom and bust; we will stick to, and build on, our record of rescue and reform.

When the right hon. Gentleman was speaking about this country’s economic situation, it was as if he had completely forgotten the sheer mess in which the Labour Government, in which he was a Minister, left this country. We have not forgotten, however, and neither has the country. Indeed, the situation was well outlined in the letter from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who explained that there was “no money left”. Under a Conservative-led Government, employment is up, inflation is down, rates are down, and wages are up. The country is on the move, and the Labour party would do well to stop doing it down and start recognising that we are moving forward. I am sure that at some stage Labour Members will come back and tell us what the spending reductions that they outlined in their manifesto would be.

We heard more original contributions to the debate from Members across the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg) stated his desire for more neighbourhood planning and outlined his work to support that not just in his area, but with Civic Voice more generally. I have already spoken to the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the National Association of Local Councils, and the Royal Town Planning Institute about proposals in the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill, which were welcomed by them all.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) was pleased with the innovations in the Queen’s Speech that were outlined earlier by my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary and outlined the importance of seeing UK-wide benefit from those measures—I am glad that he now agrees that we are “Better Together”. My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) continues to make a strong case for improvements to

[Brandon Lewis]

roads and infrastructure in his area, and I will come on to the comments made by the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) about 1 million homes in a moment.

I have worked closely with my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) to ensure that new and affordable homes are built in areas such as his, and that people have the chance to buy a home of their own. The Labour party tried to block that policy at every opportunity, but we have delivered it through the Housing and Planning Act 2016, and it can deliver new jobs. I look forward to working with hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), and I appreciate his comments about our work to improve the situation for leaseholders. My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) outlined his views on neighbourhood plans, again reinforcing just how important they can be. We should remember that such plans deliver more homes.

The hon. Members for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) and for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) spoke about a wide range of matters that ranged from transport to health and business rates. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) also mentioned business rates, and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) outlined the issues with the Humber bridge. I reassure her that we will ensure that tolls on the Humber bridge do not return to their peak under Labour—we cut them in 2012. The hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) spoke about investment in the northern powerhouse, as did the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins). The northern powerhouse involves vast investment and devolution, and that has been welcomed by Labour council leaders in the north, who are working with my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), the Minister for the northern powerhouse.

Barbara Keeley: Labour Members are getting used to discourteous winding-up speeches from Ministers, but the hon. Gentleman did not have the courtesy to listen when I and other Labour Members were speaking, and he has just summarised what three people said in about six words. I spoke on behalf of 7 million carers and 2.6 million women who are affected by this Government's changes to the state pension age, and I think that that deserves a little more than three words from the Minister. He is extending a discourtesy. This is a "so what?" Queen's Speech from a "so what?" Government who cannot even be bothered to support it.

Brandon Lewis: I am slightly surprised, if not disappointed, by the hon. Lady's slightly snipey intervention, because I have not finished mentioning what Members spoke about. If she had paid more attention when she was speaking, she would have seen that I listened to everything she said, particularly about the pensions Bill. I will ensure that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions reads her speech so that he can respond to it, and when the Bill is brought forward, he will no doubt respond to her directly. The hon. Lady can do better than that kind of intervention.

Hon. Members from across the House have outlined their views and concerns about the effect that the vote on 23 June could have on investment and about the

importance of our EU membership. I agree with them that our membership is important for investment, particularly overseas investment, and the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) will agree with me that stability for investors is vital if housing is to continue to grow. Any disruption to that could be quite damaging, and if housing is damaged, our economy will be too. I think, therefore, that hon. Members have made an important point.

Today's debate, as was fitting to its subject matter, has ranged far and wide, from pensioners and integrated transport to intergalactic transport, but hon. Members will excuse me, I hope, if I bring us back to the Bills that my Department will be leading on in the year ahead. Having just completed work on the Housing and Planning Act 2016, in the last Session, DCLG officials, who like to stay busy, are delighted to be taking on two new Bills. The first is the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill. Since 2010, the number of homes granted planning permission has increased by over 50%. In the last year, permissions have been granted for over 255,000 new homes. Net additions to the housing stock have recovered from the record lows that the right hon. Gentleman oversaw and which were achieved under the last Labour Government, while the number of first-time buyers is up by 57% since 2009, with 262,000 first-time buyers last year alone. But we must go further and faster. We want 1 million more homes this Parliament and 1 million more first-time buyers. The right hon. Gentleman might want to update his figures. Homelessness remains below its peak under the last Government. We have been clear we want to deliver 400,000 affordable homes, meaning the biggest Government-led building programme since the 1970s. More than 181,000 homes were built last year, up from the 88,000 he left us with. That is a 25% rise last year alone, which dwarves the 2% he referred to.

Melanie Onn: Homelessness has doubled under this Conservative Government. Is the Minister suggesting that people will go from being homeless to accessing these 400,000 so-called affordable homes?

Brandon Lewis: We need to work across the piece not only on building new homes but on the better care fund, social services, the No Second Night Out campaign and our extra investment in homelessness. So ultimately, yes, we will have done our job to the best of our ability when we give everybody in the country the chance to own their own home. Labour seems to want to stop people having that chance. The hon. Lady might want to think about the fact that 86% of our population want to own their own home. She might want to support their ambitions rather than doing them down.

In addition to the 1 million more homes and the 1 million first-time buyers, we want enduring, sustainable improvement to the delivery of new housing in this country. The chronic under-supply of new British homes is a failure that was decades in the making. Halfway through this turnaround decade, our changes are bearing fruit. In this Parliament and the last, we have devoted the effort required first to rescue and then to reform housing delivery. Time spent building carefully on each round of reform, learning from experience and forming the local relationships required for delivery, is time well spent.

As we saw in the previous decade, the quick and dirty debt-fuelled approach to building more houses is no solution at all. Rather, it led directly to a disaster that set Britain back by years. The purpose of the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill is to empower local communities to plan and deliver the development they need where they need it. It will simplify and streamline the neighbourhood planning process and give communities confidence and certainty that their voices will be heard as soon as possible. The creation of a fully fledged neighbourhood planning system stands as one of the great reforms of this Government. The neighbourhood planning process is now under way in thousands of communities.

Andrew Gwynne: The Minister knows that I have an interest in neighbourhood planning because he responded to my Adjournment debate earlier this year about problems in the Haughton Green area of my constituency. What assurances can he give to the people of Haughton Green that the things they want to see happen in their community could be delivered through the Bill? For example, will there be a neighbourhood right of appeal—something the Government blocked when Labour tabled amendments on such a measure?

Brandon Lewis: Actually, the Labour party did not vote or even call a vote on the neighbourhood planning third-party right of appeal. The hon. Gentleman might like to check back and see how that issue played out. What we want to ensure, through the Bill, is that there is no need for a third-party right of appeal, because the community's voice will have been heard at the beginning of the process. I think prevention is much better than cure. Having talked to organisations such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England, and to colleagues and people who have drawn up neighbourhood plans around the country, that certainly seems to be the more popular way to get things done.

Barbara Keeley: I was one of the shadow Ministers on the Localism Bill and we did support the community right to appeal—I know because I was there. A big issue is brewing in my constituency. There has been a lot of talk about neighbourhoods having a say, but the Secretary of State appears to have dropped support for a substantial local application. My community and my constituents are thoroughly sick of the lack of support at national level from the Secretary of State for important local green-belt issues.

Brandon Lewis: I am sure the hon. Lady will appreciate that I cannot comment on any particular planning application, but when it comes to support for the green belt, this Government have gone further than ever before to ensure that the green belt is properly protected. Ultimately, it is a matter for the local community, but as I said, when it comes to neighbourhood planning, she might like to have a look at what her party called votes on during the passage of the Housing and Planning Act 2016. She might like to update her knowledge on that.

To date, almost 200 neighbourhood plans have passed referendums, including a case in the last couple of weeks. We saw 18 go through in just one week—pretty much a record—with more going through week by week. Local people are now participants, not bystanders,

in the planning process. That is helping to transform attitudes to development, and there is a much more positive approach to it. It turns out that when planning is done with people instead of being done to them, we create trust and see more homes given planning permission. We want to go further, and I am determined to provide the certainty and ease to neighbourhood planning that people want.

The Bill will make sure that planning conditions are imposed by planning authorities only where necessary. Let me be clear about the problem. As the Minister for Housing and Planning, I have had examples come to me of planning permissions with hundreds of conditions attached, the worst of which are those that stop any work happening at all until further details are agreed—so-called pre-commencement conditions. The worst I have heard of so far had over 800 of them.

I am aware of cases where half of the conditions attached require further agreement from the local authority. These are planning permissions that have been given the green light for building, but it can take months or even years to resolve these conditions. Many Members of all parties will have had residents affected or seen for themselves examples of sites for which permission has been granted, yet they have not been built on. It is most frustrating for a community to see that, and we need to put an end to it. We need to get people building on sites more quickly. The grief this causes is not restricted to companies who cannot get on with building because it affects communities themselves—the local communities that draw up their neighbourhood plans and go through the process of getting planning permission. They decide for themselves where they want new building to take place, and that localisation and simplification of the planning process is behind much of the successful new building since 2010.

When sites that have gained permission are drowned with pre-commencement conditions, disillusion with the entire planning system sets in. Frankly, it is toxic. We need to make sure that the power to decide where building will take place stays in the hands of local communities, which is why we need to refine the process. This is not—let me be very clear—about taking away any protections or checks; it is about stopping needless bureaucracy and time-wasting. Our intention is that many issues will be resolvable at the same time that the building is under way, making sure that any legitimate concerns are addressed without holding up production of the houses that we need.

Another key element of the Bill is the completion of our reforms to compulsory purchase. For the avoidance of confusion, this involves purchase at current, not future, use value. The Government do not propose changing the existing fundamental principle that compensation should be paid at market value in the absence of the scheme underlying the compulsory purchase. These proposals are intended to make the compulsory purchase process clearer, fairer and faster for all parties involved in it. The key point is that we are not changing anything like that.

If we want a much wider range of developers to play their part in building the homes and infrastructure we need, we must remove risk from the process of planning and land acquisition. Needless uncertainty does nothing to protect the countryside or to guarantee good design. What it does is restrict home building to the biggest

[Brandon Lewis]

players. The Bill, however, will give communities the tools that they need to diversify development, enabling both quantity and quality to be achieved in house building. It will also establish the independent National Infrastructure Commission on a statutory basis. I appreciate what was said about that by the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne. The establishment of the commission is the next step in the Government's plan to improve UK infrastructure, and will help us to deliver our manifesto pledge to invest more than £100 billion in our infrastructure networks during the current Parliament.

The second piece of legislation, the local growth and jobs Bill, will make an equally important contribution, not least by giving communities a direct financial stake in their future growth. Most important, the Bill will deliver on our commitment to allow 100% retention of business rates by councils, and, moreover, will allow them to reduce the business tax rate. It will also enable combined authority mayors to levy a supplement on business rate bills to fund new infrastructure projects. That will require the support of the business community through the relevant local enterprise partnership, but the potential for locally led infrastructure investment is clear.

All this takes place within the broader context of localism—of growth and devolution deals throughout our country, and of the decentralisation of billions of pounds of infrastructure funds. Local communities have never had a bigger opportunity to direct their future development. Indeed, who can blame certain Opposition Members for eyeing up those opportunities? With the political undead occupying their Front Benches, a new life in our newly empowered city halls has never looked so enticing. “In the name of God, go!” is what Oliver

Cromwell told a previous Parliament. What I would say to Opposition Members such as the shadow Home Secretary who have itchy feet is “Yes, go for it: there has never been a better time to be in local government, with more influence and more power to do things for your local community than ever before.”

Mr Betts: May I return the Minister to a point that I raised earlier? May we have this on the record? Is the building of a million new homes during the current Parliament a Government commitment?

Brandon Lewis: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was present for the first part of my speech, but I made it very clear that yes, we have an ambition to deliver a million homes during the current Parliament.

It falls to me to have the final word in today's debate, but in years to come it will not fall to me, to the hon. Gentleman—the Chair of the Select Committee—or, indeed, to anyone else in the House. The final word on transport, infrastructure, housing and other matters that are vital to local growth will not be heard in the Chamber at all. Instead, thanks to this Conservative-led Government, key decisions will be made with communities that have been empowered to set their own course. They will be part of their own destiny. They will be designing, drafting and delivering on their own long-term economic plans, and I am proud to be part of the one nation Conservative Government who are setting them free to do so. That is why this is such an important Gracious Speech. It is delivering for our country, and I commend it to the House.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(*Jackie Doyle-Price.*)

Debate to be resumed on Monday 23 May.

Committee on Standards

[Relevant documents: Report from the House of Commons Commission, Additional Lay Members of the Committee on Standards: Nomination of Candidates, Session 2015-16, HC 848.]

4.13 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I beg to move,

That, in accordance with Standing Order No. 149A, the following be appointed as lay members of the Committee on Standards:

(1) Jane Burgess and Dr Arun Midha, for a period of six years; and

(2) Charmaine Burton and Sir Peter Rubin, for a period of four years.

As Members will recall, we started in 2013 with three lay members on the Committee on Standards, together with 10 elected members. Let me take this opportunity to thank the three pioneers who were appointed at that time—Sharon Darcy, Peter Jinman and Walter Radar—for their continuing dedication to the work of the Committee. Such has been their impact that in March 2015 the House agreed to the Committee's recommendation that there should be equality of numbers, with seven elected and seven lay members. Last year, the House of Commons Commission accordingly set in train a recruitment process to select four additional members, and today's motion is the last step in that process.

The Commission has produced a report giving much more detail of the process that was followed, but, for the record, I should emphasise that, in accordance with the Standing Order, these candidates were selected on the basis of a fair and open competition. The recruitment panel was headed by an independent chair and was assisted by a recruitment consultant.

Rather pleasingly, 380 applications were received. After longlisting, shortlisting and final interviews, the panel put forward to the Commission a package of candidates reflecting a mix of skills and experience and a diversity of background, gender, age and geographical location. The Commission was happy to endorse those recommendations, and I would like to put on record our thanks to the recruitment panel for its hard work in identifying such a strong group of candidates from the field.

Looking at the candidates themselves, I am sure the House will agree that they are not just the usual suspects and that they will bring a broad range of insights and experience to their work on the Committee. In brief, Jane Burgess is the partners' counsellor and a main board director at John Lewis Partnership; Charmaine Burton is involved in community work and is the host of her own radio show in Birmingham; Dr Arun Midha has experience working with a number of public bodies in different sectors, primarily in Wales; and Sir Peter Rubin is the former chair of the General Medical

Council and professor emeritus at the University of Nottingham. Further biographical details of all the candidates are published in the Commission's report for the information of the House and beyond.

The House will note that the motion proposes differing lengths of office for these appointments. Lay members may be appointed for fixed terms of up to six years. The appointments are not renewable. On the advice of the recruitment panel, the Commission is recommending that the new appointments be staggered to provide for two terms of four years and two of six years, to militate against the loss of expertise and experience when lay members come to the end of their service.

I am sure other Members will join me in wishing the new lay members well in their new role. I ask the House to agree the motion for the appointments.

Question put and agreed to.

PETITION

Closure of Lloyds Bank in Bredbury

4.16 pm

William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I rise to present a petition relating to the closure of the Lloyds bank branch in Bredbury, located in the Woodley precinct in my constituency. High street banks play a vital role as part of the make-up of our high streets. They are an important point for people to access their money and to get financial advice. Members of the community will struggle if the bank closes. This is particularly important to elderly and vulnerable people, who may not use online banking facilities. A further local petition on this matter has attracted over 580 signatures. The petitioners therefore request that this House urge the Government to do all they can to prevent the closure of the Bredbury branch of Lloyds bank.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the proposed closure of the Bredbury branch of Lloyds Bank will have a negative impact on the local area; further that vulnerable members of the community will struggle if the bank closes as most do not use online banking; further that the bank staff deal with many different situations with dignity and care which is vital in a community where there is a large elderly population; further that a number of dedicated staff will be made unemployed; and further that a local petition on this matter has been signed by 580 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to stop the closure of the Bredbury branch of Lloyds Bank.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P001696]

Detention of Kamal Foroughi in Iran

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Mr Shailesh Vara.*)

4.17 pm

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): I am very grateful that this debate has been selected. It deals with an important subject, which has gained even greater relevance in recent weeks.

Kamal Foroughi is a 76-year-old dual UK-Iranian citizen. In 2001, he was working in Iran as a consultant for the Malaysian oil and gas company Petronas. He had never previously been in trouble with the law. He spent his life socialising with friends, playing and watching tennis, and working for Petronas. He had no involvement whatever in politics—in fact, he was glad to be both British and Iranian. However, on 5 May 2001 he was arrested by plain-clothes police who refused to show any identification or to explain what was happening. He was given no choice but to get into their car, in which he was driven to the notorious Evin prison. He was held there in solitary confinement for the following 18 months without charge.

Mr Foroughi was finally told the charges when his trial commenced in early 2013. The trial was conducted by branch 15 of the revolutionary court. It was lacking in even the rudiments of natural justice. He was granted access to a lawyer only the day before the hearing, he was forced to attend the trial without his lawyer, and no record or transcript of the trial has even been produced. Indeed, the Iranian authorities have never publicly mentioned Mr Foroughi's name, let alone explained why they are holding him. We know that he was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment: seven years for espionage and one for possessing alcoholic beverages, both of which, of course, he denies. As hon. Members know, the United Kingdom, as part of the P5+1, recently secured agreement with Iran on the joint comprehensive plan of action to deal with its nuclear programme.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing the matter to the House for consideration. He will be aware of the UN resolution on human rights in Iran, where there is quite clear and blatant discrimination against ethnic minorities and persecution of Christian groups. Is he aware of any steps that the Home Office has taken to secure Mr Foroughi's release, or of any discussions that have been held to establish what evidence, if any, exists against Mr Foroughi?

Oliver Dowden: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. On his second point, it is hard to determine whether there is any evidence to substantiate the charges against Mr Foroughi, because the Iranian regime is so lacking in transparency. Even his own family do not know the details of what he has been charged with or the evidence for it. I understand that representations by Her Majesty's Government have been undertaken by the Foreign Office, and I will come on to those in a minute. The matter has been raised at every level, including by the Prime Minister.

As I was saying, Members are aware that the United Kingdom has recently secured a deal with Iran on the joint comprehensive plan of action. Many of us had

reservations about the seriousness of Iran's intent in concluding that deal. Its underlying purpose is to secure a path for Iran to normalise its international relations. In regard to that, the complete lack of transparency shown by the regime in relation to Mr Foroughi's case is a worrying indication. It demonstrates a disregard for basic international norms against arbitrary detention and for the right to a fair, public, independent and impartial trial.

This May marks the fifth anniversary of Mr Foroughi's detention. His son, my constituent Mr Kamran Foroughi, is up in the Gallery today, and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to him for his tireless efforts to secure his father's release. He has been joined by many other Members of this House in that campaign, and I pay tribute to them for the work that they have undertaken.

In today's debate, I seek to draw attention to Mr Foroughi's case, to make the case for his release on humanitarian grounds and to show the world—and, most importantly, the Iranian regime—that his case has not been forgotten. That is well represented by the fact that more than 130,000 people have signed a petition calling for his release on compassionate grounds. That really demonstrates how many people care about his plight. Since my constituent chose to go public last year, I have raised this case on two occasions in the House, and I have met my hon. Friend the Foreign Office Minister with Mr Kamran Foroughi to discuss ways of securing his father's release. I know how seriously my hon. Friend the Minister takes this case. I am pleased that the Prime Minister has personally raised it with President Rouhani. I know that the Foreign Secretary has raised it with his opposite number in Iran, and that representations have been made by my hon. Friend the Minister.

One of the challenges faced by Ministers is the fact that Iran does not recognise that the United Kingdom Government have any locus in relation to dual UK-Iranian citizens. That puts them at particular risk when they travel to Iran. We have seen that in relation to both UK-Iranian citizens and US-Iranian citizens, and it appears that the Iranian regime views them with particularly intense suspicion. Their rights are often trampled on by the Iranian judicial system, and, given the stance taken by the Iranian regime in relation to dual citizens, it is very hard for them to be represented properly by their home Government.

Previously, the Foreign Office has warned of the risks faced by British travellers to Iran from

“high levels of suspicion about the UK”,

arbitrary detention, and

“the UK Government's limited ability to assist in any difficulty”.

The Foreign Office used to make reference to a case in 2011, which we presume was the case of Mr Foroughi. That guidance has recently been removed, and I would be grateful if the Minister could address the risks faced by British citizens travelling to Iran, and the reasons for the change in that advice, when he responds to the debate. This risk has been very vividly illustrated in recent days by the case of Mrs Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, another dual UK-Iranian citizen. Nazanin was visiting family in Iran in early April when she was detained by members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard at Iman Khomeini airport in Tehran. She was transported 600 miles south to Kerman province, where she has been kept in solitary

confinement. Her 22-month-old daughter, a—sole—British citizen, was stripped of her passport and taken away from her mother at the airport.

I know that all our hearts will go out to Nazanin, her husband Richard and her family for the suffering that they have endured. My constituent Mr Kamran Foroughi has been in touch with Mr Ratcliffe, and they have been a source of comfort for each other during this extremely difficult time.

This case illustrates the fact that the Iranian regime is alert to international coverage and representations. Since Nazanin's case secured a lot of coverage in the media, she has in fact been released from solitary confinement and has been given very limited access to her daughter. Although that is clearly well short of the full and immediate release that her case demands, it is a welcome signal.

Similarly, in Mr Foroughi's case, there are urgent humanitarian grounds for his release. Not only is Mr Foroughi an elderly man, but in 2011, before he was detained, his London-based doctor informed him that he was at risk of developing cancer and required regular check-ups. Since his detention, Mr Foroughi has received only one medical check-up, which took place last November. Again, that happened only after international attention had been drawn to Mr Foroughi's case. Sadly, his family still do not know the outcome of that check-up, which is a source of considerable concern for them.

Given that Mr Foroughi has three years left to serve, my constituent and his two girls—Kamal Foroughi's grandchildren—are very concerned that he will die in prison, isolated and alone. Iranian law allows somebody to be released early if they have served a third of their sentence. As Mr Foroughi has served over half of his sentence, I really urge the Iranian authorities to show some humanity and urgently release this elderly man purely on compassionate grounds so that he can finally be reunited with his children and grandchildren.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate about his constituent Mr Foroughi. He mentions that the right thing to do—purely on compassionate grounds, without any reference to the Iranian justice system—would be to release Mr Foroughi. Does he agree that, since Islam is a religion of compassion, releasing Mr Foroughi would also be the Islamic thing to do?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That approach has been taken by Mr Foroughi's family. To put aside my earlier criticisms of the manner in which his trial was conducted, however the Iranian regime may dispute such criticisms, it really cannot dispute the compassionate and, as my hon. Friend says, the Islamic grounds for his release, which are that he is a very elderly man suffering from cancer.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on putting forward this case so articulately. May I suggest that, as well as its being compassionate, humanitarian and Islamic, it would also be very diplomatic for the Iranian authorities to do this? They seem to be showing some sort of compassion towards Mrs Ratcliffe, about whom one of my constituents has written to me. It is important that the Iranians realise the extent of the coverage and awareness of these

cases, and the positive signal this would send to this country and to many people here who are worried about such cases. If Iran really wishes to improve her relations with the United Kingdom, this would be a wonderful way of making an appropriate gesture.

Oliver Dowden: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend. I was coming on to the point that UK-Iranian relations are in general improving, and it would be a very good signal of the warmth of those relations if the release took place. I understand that the Iranian Government have made the legitimate point about the separation between the judiciary and Ministers, but I feel that Ministers should bring to bear every kind of pressure they can to secure that release.

Sadly for Mr Foroughi's family, they have suffered considerable ups and downs in relation to his case. They were initially advised that if they kept quiet about it, his release could be secured. That did not happen, so they eventually took the very difficult decision to go public. There were indications from the Iranian regime that he might be released on both the fourth and fifth anniversaries of his imprisonment. Again, that did not happen. The family's fear now is that he may face the fate of other prisoners who, at the end of their original sentence, are then charged with further crimes, leading to longer and possibly indefinite spells in prison.

I would be grateful if the Minister could update the House on his understanding of the current status of Mr Foroughi's case and what further steps the Government plan to take over the coming months to facilitate the release of both Mr Foroughi and Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again; he has been very gracious. The issue I want to bring to his attention is the gentleman's medical condition. We all know that cancer can be exacerbated by stress and poor conditions. The hon. Gentleman has asked the Minister what contact he has had with the Iranian authorities, but could he also ask whether regular medical checks can be made, because those are very necessary at a time of critical medical and health needs?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I was slightly loose with my wording earlier: the fear is that Mr Foroughi has cancer. Because he has had only one check-up, the family do not know whether cancer has developed, which adds to the worry. Again, it is a solid humanitarian basis for him to have regular check-ups and, frankly, for his release. Releasing him would be compliant with Iranian law because he has already served a significant proportion of his term.

Releases have taken place in the past. I was pleased to see that in January four American-Iranian dual citizens were released, including the journalist Jason Rezaian who had been detained for two years. Again, I would be grateful if the Minister could explain to the House what lessons might be learned from those cases. I know that they are not directly comparable, but it would be helpful to understand the distinctions.

As I said earlier, UK-Iranian relations continue to improve overall, but many hon. Members would take it as an indication of the seriousness of the Iranian Government's commitment to improving Anglo-Iranian relations if they were to use every means at their disposal

[*Oliver Dowden*]

to secure the release of both those citizens and others in similar situations. I will conclude my remarks by conveying a message from Mr Foroughi's son and grandchildren. It is simple—"Please let Grandpa come home."

4.32 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden) on securing the debate and thank him and the Minister for allowing me to make a short contribution. I welcome the recent improvements in relations between the UK and Iran, and I hope that this will provide some space and an opportunity for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to raise human rights issues with the Iranian authorities and have a constructive dialogue with them.

Mr Foroughi's case, which I have raised previously with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is distressing and perplexing. It is unclear what the charges against him are. Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case is very similar. Some 150,000 people have signed the change.org petition in support of her release. Both she and Mr Foroughi appear to have been subject to arbitrary detention. In the absence of any justification from the Iranian authorities, we have to come to that conclusion.

I am aware from a parliamentary answer that I have received that the Foreign Secretary has discussed Mr Foroughi's case with the Foreign Minister, Dr Zarif. Can the Minister give any indication of whether the Iranians are considering changing their position in relation to dual citizenship? Are they willing to consider doing that? Can the Minister confirm when the Foreign Secretary will next raise the cases of Mr Foroughi and Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe with the Foreign Minister? If the UK authorities are not allowed access, could the FCO request access by another organisation, such as the Red Crescent or local humanitarian organisations, or does the Minister think that that would not, regrettably, deliver any results? I hope he would agree that as Iran opens up and more businesses from the UK go out to develop relationships there—I suspect that these will often be initiatives driven by British-Iranian citizens—they need to have certainty that if they do go to Iran, whether on business or to visit family, they will be able to return. Otherwise, those business and family links will not be established or will not be able to be re-established as Iran opens up to UK citizens and UK trade.

I wish to raise one final issue. Many Members will know that the fate of the Baha'is in Iran is difficult, and the Minister will be aware of the case involving 24 Baha'is who were sentenced to 193 years in prison by a Gorgan court. Although probably not a matter for this debate, is it one he is pursuing? Perhaps he would write to me about it with an update on the situation there.

4.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden) for securing this important debate and for the measured tone he has adopted in raising this delicate matter. As he implied in his speech, he has not

just brought this to the Floor of the House today, but has been pursuing it and supporting the family for a long period. We have met on a number of occasions and I have been grateful for the support and communication he has provided to me in being able to place light on this, and improve the communication with the family and make the case to the Iranians. I am very grateful to him for the approach he has adopted.

My hon. Friend pointed out that we are dealing with dual nationality here, which is critical to this case in comparison with others. It is important to make it clear to the House that Foreign Office support for those who carry two passports, who have two nationalities, is different from that provided to those who have a single British passport. Ownership of that second passport obligates the citizen to that second state, and the laws and processes it has in place. From my Foreign Office consular policy perspective—this is consistent through not just our Government, but previous Governments—I can say that we do not normally provide the same level of assistance to dual nationals in the country of their second nationality, unless there are extreme, exceptional circumstances, for example, humanitarian grounds, health conditions and so on. It is important to make it clear that there is a distinction between the two.

Today, we are considering a case in Iran, which does not recognise a dual nationality, regardless of what that country is, be it Britain or otherwise. Iran formally does not recognise another country in terms of intervening in any way whatsoever. Although we disagree with that position on dual nationality when we speak to the Iranians, we need to understand it and place it into context. I have also explained in my meetings with the Iranians that the reason why Britain, the Foreign Office and Parliament take an interest in these things is that these individuals do hold a British passport, hence there is an interest and we therefore request that dialogue in certain specific cases.

Let me step back from consular matters per se, as my hon. Friend did touch on this point. Following the nuclear deal, we are seeing Iran enter a new chapter of opportunity for transition—I choose my words carefully, because there is an awful lot to move forward in order for this opportunity to come to fruition. Our embassy has reopened in Tehran, visits are now taking place in both directions and trade opportunities are also being explored.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): My constituent Councillor Jill Houlbrook, a former lord mayor of Chester and the auntie of Richard Ratcliffe, whose wife Nazanin has been detained, will be most relieved and gratified to have heard the contribution by the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden), and the delicate but persuasive way in which he put it. The Minister talks about Iran opening up, and the Chairman of the Defence Committee mentioned that Iran might be opening up and also opening out. The Minister will be very cautious about his dealings with Iran, but does he detect an improvement in the tone of Iran that might assist us in resolving the cases that the hon. Member for Hertsmere spoke about so eloquently?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The atmosphere developing between our two countries is providing greater opportunities to raise

delicate matters. I will, if I may, come on to that point later, and I will also, time permitting, touch on the Mrs Ratcliffe case in a second.

With that embassy opening, there are more opportunities for bilateral meetings to take place. A series of meetings have already taken place at a number of levels. Most recently, the Foreign Secretary raised Mr Foroughi's case with Foreign Minister Zarif in the margins of the International Syria Support Group. The meeting took place on Monday of this week. Yesterday afternoon, in preparation for this debate, I met Iran's chargé d'affaires, Mr Habibollahzadeh, to discuss Mr Foroughi's case.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary raised Mr Foroughi's case with Foreign Minister Zarif in London in February, and the Prime Minister wrote to President Rouhani last year, and also discussed Mr Foroughi's case with him in January of this year. The Foreign Secretary raised Mr Foroughi's case during his visit to Tehran in August 2015 when our embassy was reopened. We have also been utilising our partnership relationships with Germany, France and Italy to get them to lobby the Iranian Government on our behalf.

There has been a huge amount of effort at the very highest of levels to raise these matters. On a consular level, the team in the Foreign Office is working to support the family and to make sure that we are providing the consular assistance that is expected.

In answer to the questions of the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), the reopening of the British embassy on 23 August last year has enabled us to have face-to-face discussions about a series of consular cases—not just the two that have been mentioned here today. He asked specifically about the direction of travel. We have seen the results of the Majlis elections and the panel of experts. Clearly, that is an indication that Iran wants to move in a new and welcome direction, but there is a long way to go. Part of that includes showing that discussions on sensitive matters such as this can also take place at the same time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere asked a couple of questions, to which I will now turn. First, our travel advice explains that the security services in Iran remain suspicious of individuals with links to the UK, and we advise travellers to keep in close contact with friends and family. British nationals, including dual nationals—British-Iranian nationals—face greater risks at present than nationals from other countries.

My hon. Friend asked about the medical checks for Mr Foroughi. Again, we have asked the Iranians to ensure that he receives regular medical check-ups. The Iranians have confirmed that he now has access to a doctor.

Oliver Dowden: Specifically on that point, it is important to know not just whether the check-ups are taking place, but what the outcomes are. Can diplomatic efforts be made to secure the outcome of those medical checks, particularly to comfort Mr Foroughi's family?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I will make sure that that is passed on to the Iranians. The family should be kept more readily informed of the medical condition of Mr Foroughi. May I also pay tribute to Kamran Foroughi, whom I have had the honour to meet? He has been working on this extremely

diligently, and he is doing his best, in a measured and constructive way, to shine a light on this matter in a way that will lead to results.

Going to the media is a double-edged sword. Sharing the story and having it on front pages can have an adverse effect. Without reference to this case, I can say that the reaction to discussion of other consular cases in the media has delayed matters, caused frustrations and affected sensitivities. In other cases, media attention has highlighted matters and could be perceived to have moved things on. It is the family's call in all cases. I simply make the humble point that it always makes sense to work with the Foreign Office and consular staff so that our strategy to leverage change and ensure that an individual is able to leave or whatever they are requesting to do is as efficient and expeditious as possible.

I was asked when would be the next opportunity to raise this matter. I will seek to meet Dr Zarif, the Foreign Minister, in Helsinki next week at a conference. It will be another opportunity to keep the matter to the fore.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is another dual nationality case. She was arrested on 3 April and has not been charged. She has a very young daughter in Iran. We have provided consular support to Mrs Ratcliffe's family since we were first made aware of the arrest. I met Richard Ratcliffe yesterday to discuss the matter and I raised it at my meeting with the Iranian chargé d'affaires when I met him in the afternoon. I understand that the daughter is now with her grandparents, which is good news, and I welcome the fact that Mrs Ratcliffe has been released from solitary confinement.

We are concerned about Mr Foroughi's continued detention. I understand that it is both worrying and distressing for his family, and we are doing all we can to support them.

Mr Bacon: My hon. Friend mentioned the Foreign Office's travel advice, which has changed. It is certainly not for me to question it. When I went to Iran a year or so ago, I found it very safe. It is probably fair to say that it is now one of the safest places in the middle east.

To return to my hon. Friend's point about dual nationality, of course, even if we differ from the position of the Government of Iran, we can respect their position. When I met the chargé d'affaires, Mr Habibollahzadeh, two weeks ago, he lobbied me about the fact that OCR had withdrawn the Persian GCSE. I spoke to the Education Secretary about it and she told me yesterday that Pearson had agreed to take it on. That is one more indication of the efforts that are being made to strengthen relations. The Iranian embassy legitimately takes an interest in the welfare of the 350,000 people of Iranian heritage who live in this country, many of whom are dual nationals, and in their desire to protect, cherish and enhance their links, including with the language. Does he agree that it would be a powerful symbol of the Iranian Government's seriousness about improving relations with the United Kingdom if they could apply all possible pressure within their own system in the case of Mr Foroughi?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to the interest, knowledge and expertise that my hon. Friend provides in relation to Iran. He is right, and he touches on a number of avenues for leveraging and advancing the bond. I fully

[Mr Ellwood]

agree that this is an opportunity to show that this is what countries that develop stronger relationships are able to do—we can engage behind the scenes and through consular matters to get the best outcomes, engaging at the same time in other areas, including education. I fully concur with what my hon. Friend says.

The reopening of the British embassy in Tehran last year and the successful implementation of the nuclear deal earlier this year are positive steps in our relationship with Iran. Our renewed diplomatic presence gives us the opportunity for face-to-face discussions on issues such

as Mr Foroughi's case. The Government will continue to do whatever we can to support Mr Foroughi's family and to raise our concerns with the Iranians at every opportunity. I sincerely hope that he will be reunited with his family soon, and I concur with my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere and believe that there are strong humanitarian grounds for consideration of the release of both Mr Foroughi and Mrs Ratcliffe.

Question put and agreed to.

4.50 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 19 May 2016

TREASURY

National Infrastructure Commission

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands): Yesterday, I laid the response to the National Infrastructure Commission consultation [CM 9289]. This reconfirms the Government's plans to establish the Commission via primary legislation, and sets out a number of areas where policy has developed following public consultation.

On 5 October 2015, the Chancellor announced the creation of the National Infrastructure Commission to provide expert independent analysis of the long-term infrastructure needs of the country. The Commission has been operating in interim form since then.

The Government held a 10-week public consultation between 7 January and 17 March on the governance, structure and operation of the Commission. The public consultation attracted 136 responses, primarily from industry associations, companies, lobby groups, local authorities and research bodies. The majority were very supportive of the concept, and of the Government's proposals for fully establishing the Commission.

The response confirms that the Commission will produce a national infrastructure assessment once in every Parliament, setting out its analysis of the UK's infrastructure needs over a 10 to 30-year time horizon. The Commission will also examine pressing and significant infrastructure challenges in studies set by the Government. The Government will be obliged formally to respond to the Commission's recommendations.

To fulfil its objectives, the Commission will be able to request information and analysis from Government Departments. The Commission will work within a remit to ensure that it recommends infrastructure that is sustainable and affordable and offers real economic benefits.

The Government intend to introduce legislation to place the Commission on a permanent, independent footing as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Copies of the response are available in the Vote Office, Printed Paper Office and on the gov.uk website.

[HCWS2]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs and General Affairs Councils: 23-24 May

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 May and I will attend the General Affairs Council on 24 May. The Foreign Affairs Council will be

chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the General Affairs Council will be chaired by the Dutch presidency. The meetings will be held in Brussels.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) will be preceded by the annual EU-Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting. The FAC agenda will include the Syria/Iraq/counter-Daesh regional strategy, the EU global strategy and external aspects of migration. Ms. Mogherini is expected to cover the Arctic and Libya in her opening remarks.

EU-Eastern Partnership ministerial

EU Foreign Ministers will meet with the Foreign Ministers of the six Eastern Partnership states—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine—to review progress on the Eastern Partnership initiative since the EU-Eastern Partnership summit held in Riga on 21-22 May 2015.

Syria/Iraq/counter-Daesh regional strategy

The May Foreign Affairs Council will review of External Action Service (EEAS)/Commission programmes and projects undertaken within the framework of the March 2015 regional strategy for handling Syria, Iraq and the Daesh threat. This review will assess how the EU has been supporting political transition in Syria, political settlement in Iraq and efforts to defeat and degrade Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

The European Union global strategy

Over lunch the High Representative will update Ministers on the preparation of the European Union global strategy.

External aspects of migration

Ministers will exchange views on the external aspects of migration. We expect the focus of the discussion to be on common security and defence policy (CSDP) activities to support the development of border security in Libya and the Sahel. Building the capacity of the Libyan coastguard is of particular importance. We will also use the opportunity to discuss progress on Valletta action plan implementation. With a range of high-level international events this year, leading up to the UNGA high-level event on large movements of migrants and refugees, there is an opportunity for the international community to build a sustainable global response to large population movements and the issue of irregular migration, by placing an emphasis on global responsibility sharing, reducing large-scale irregular migration, and providing protection and humanitarian support to those who need it.

The Arctic

Following the recent publication of the joint communication on the Arctic, Ministers will discuss whether the EU's policy in the Arctic is appropriately focused. We also expect discussions on the EU's application for formal observer status at the Arctic Council.

Libya

Discussions will focus on the latest developments in the Libyan political process. The EEAS is planning for a possible civilian CSDP mission for Libya. We will press the EU to develop a realistic and achievable offer based on the needs of the Government of National Accord and the situation on the ground. We are aiming for progress towards agreeing an updated mandate for

EUNAVFOR MED (Operation Sophia), to include capacity-building for the Libyan coastguard. The Vienna ministerial on 16 May underlined international support for the Libyan political agreement, Presidency Council and Government of National Accord.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

The General Affairs Council (GAC) on 24 May is expected to focus on rule of law and preparation of the June European Council.

Rule of law

The GAC will conduct its annual dialogue on the rule of law, focusing on the issue of the integration of migrants.

Preparation of the June European Council

The GAC will prepare the agenda for the 28-29 June European Council, which the Prime Minister will attend.

[HCWS1]

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Government's Legislative Programme 2016-17

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): Following yesterday's state opening of Parliament, and for the convenience of the House, I am listing the Bills, which were announced yesterday:

Better Markets Bill
 Bill of Rights
 Bus Services Bill
 Children and Social Work Bill
 Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill
 Criminal Finances Bill
 Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill
 Digital Economy Bill
 Education for All Bill
 Higher Education and Research Bill
 Lifetime Savings Bill
 Local Growth and Jobs Bill
 Modern Transport Bill
 National Citizen Service Bill
 NHS (Overseas Visitors Charging) Bill
 Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill
 Overseas Electors Bill
 Prison and Courts Reform Bill
 Pensions Bill
 Small Charitable Donations Bill
 Wales Bill

The following Bills will carry over from the last session:

Finance (No.2) Bill
 High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill
 Investigatory Powers Bill
 Policing and Crime Bill

The following Law Commission Bills will be introduced:
 Intellectual Property (Unjustified Threats) Bill

Detailed information about each of these Bills can be accessed from the No. 10 website at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/prime-ministers-office-10-downing-street>.

[HCWS3]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Government's Legislative Programme (Northern Ireland) 2016-17

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The second Session UK legislative programme unveiled in the Queen's Speech on 18 May includes a number of measures directly relevant to the people of Northern Ireland. The majority of the 22 new Bills containing provisions that apply in Northern Ireland either in full or in part. Once again, this is a strong programme of legislation for Northern Ireland contained in a one nation Queen's Speech from a one nation Government. The Government also reaffirm their commitment to the implementation of the Stormont House agreement and "Fresh Start" agreement.

The Government are using the opportunity of a strengthening economy to deliver security for working people; increase life chances for the most disadvantaged and strengthen national security. Bills such as the Better Markets Bill and the Digital Economy Bill demonstrate our commitment to strengthening the UK economy and supporting businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland, and right across the UK. The Lifetime Savings Bill provides important support for those on lowest incomes and in encouraging the younger generation to save regularly. The Criminal Finances Bill provides a new legislative framework to tackle money laundering, criminal assets and terrorist financing.

The following is a summary of the legislation announced in the Queen's Speech and its proposed application to Northern Ireland. Some Bills are still under development, including final decisions on the extent to which provisions should extend to Northern Ireland. The list identifies the lead Government Department. It does not include draft Bills.

The following Bills will extend to Northern Ireland, in whole or in part. Some deal mainly with excepted/reserved matters. Discussions will continue between the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that, where provisions for a transferred purpose are included in any of these Bills, the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly will be sought for them.

Better Markets Bill (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
 Bill of Rights (Ministry of Justice)
 Criminal Finances (Home Office)
 Digital Economy Bill (Department for Culture, Media & Sport)
 Intellectual Property (Unjustified Threats) Bill (Law Commission Bill)
 Lifetime Savings Bill (HM Treasury)
 Overseas Electors Bill (Cabinet Office)
 Modern Transport Bill (Department for Transport)
 Small Charitable Donations Bill (HMRC)

Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill (Department for Culture, Media & Sport)

Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)

Higher Education and Research Bill (Research Councils)—
(Department for Business, Innovations and Skills)

National Citizen Service Bill (Cabinet Office)

Pensions Bill (Department for Work and Pensions)

NHS (Overseas Visitors Charging) Bill (Department of Health)

The following Bills will have limited or no application to Northern Ireland:

Bus Services Bill (Department for Transport).

Children and Social Work Bill (Department for Education)

Local Growth and Jobs Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)

Prison and Courts Reform Bill (Ministry of Justice)

Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill (Home Office)

Wales Bill (Wales Office)

Education for All Bill (Department for Education)

[HCWS5]

SCOTLAND

Government's Legislative Programme (Scotland) 2016-17

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Following the passage of the Scotland Act 2016, the Scottish Parliament is now poised to become one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world. Ensuring the smooth transfer of those new powers will be a major priority for the UK Government over the next parliamentary Session and beyond.

A total of 13 of the 21 new Government Bills for this Session of Parliament contain provisions that apply in Scotland, either in full or in part. Elements of others may extend later depending on discussion with the Scottish Government.

The Government's legislative programme has three clear aims: to deliver security for working people across our country, to increase the life chances for the most disadvantaged, and to strengthen our national security. Some of the Bills announced yesterday apply across the UK, while others cover areas where responsibility is devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

UK legislation on the digital economy will enable the building of world-class digital infrastructure including fast broadband and mobile networks, as well as helping to support new digital industries.

A new Lifetime Savings Bill will create a new help to save scheme to support those on the lowest incomes to save and also a new lifetime ISA, providing savers with a bonus on savings that can be used for a first home, or retirement, or both.

A Better Markets Bill will give UK consumers more power and choice, open up markets and make economic regulators work better. We will also take forward further reforms in a Pensions Bill that will provide greater protections for people in master trusts and remove barriers for consumers who want to access their pension savings flexibly.

This statement provides a summary of the new Government legislation for 2016-17 and its application to Scotland. It does not include draft Bills.

In line with the Sewel convention, the Government will continue to work constructively with the Scottish Government to secure legislative consent motions where appropriate.

The Bills listed in section 1 will apply to Scotland, either in full or in part. Section 2 details Bills that will not apply in Scotland, though some elements could be extended later following discussion with the Scottish Government.

Section 1: Legislation applying to the United Kingdom, including Scotland (either in full or in part);

Better Markets Bill

Criminal Finances Bill

Lifetime Savings Bill

Modern Transport Bill

Overseas Electors Bill

Pensions Bill

Small Charitable Donations Bill

Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill

Digital Economy Bill

Wales Bill (as a constitutional bill this extends to the UK, but policy will impact on Wales)

Higher Education and Research Bill

Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill

Bill of Rights

Section 2: Legislation that will not apply in Scotland, though some elements could be extended following discussion with the Scottish Government.

Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill

NHS (Overseas Visitors Charging) Bill

National Citizen Service Bill

Bus Services Bill

Children & Social Work Bill

Education for All Bill

Local Growth and Jobs Bill

Prison and Courts Reform Bill

[HCWS4]

WALES

Government's Legislative Programme (Wales) 2016-17

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): The Government's second legislative programme announced in the Queen's Speech on 18 May contains a wide range of measures that will apply to Wales either in full or in part.

The following Bills and draft Bills will extend to in whole or in part:

Better Markets Bill (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)

Bill of Rights (Ministry of Justice)

Children and Social Work Bill (Department for Education)

Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill (Home Office)

Criminal Finances Bill (Home Office)

Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill (Department for Culture, Media and Sport)

Digital Economy Bill (Department for Culture, Media and Sport)

Education for All Bill (Department for Education)

Higher Education and Research Bill (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)

Intellectual Property (Unjustified Threats) Bill (Law Commission Bill)

Lifetime Savings Bill (HM Treasury)

Modern Transport Bill (Department for Transport)

National Citizen Service Bill (Cabinet Office)*

Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)

NHS (Overseas Visitors Charging) Bill (Department of Health)*

Overseas Electors Bill (Cabinet Office)

Prison and Courts Reform Bill (Ministry of Justice)

Pensions Bill (Department for Work and Pensions)

Small Charitable Donations Bill (HMRC)

Wales Bill (Wales Office)

The following Bills will not extend to Wales:

Bus Services Bill (Department for Transport)

Local Growth and Jobs Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)

*Discussions with the Welsh Government on these Bills will consider their application to Wales.

Discussions will continue with the Welsh Government on Bills that might include provisions that require the consent of the National Assembly for Wales or Welsh Ministers.

[HCWS6]

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 19 May 2016

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