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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 22 November 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

UK-US: Future Relationship

1. **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of prospects for the future relationship between the UK and the US. [907401]

15. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the result of the US election on the UK's bilateral relationship with that country. [907416]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): Britain and America have an enduring and strong special relationship, and as the Prime Minister said during her call with President-elect Trump on 10 November, we look forward to working with his Administration to ensure the security and the prosperity of both our countries and the world in the years ahead.

Craig Tracey: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, now that a democratic process has taken place, the UK and the US need to focus on working ever more closely together on shared priorities?

Boris Johnson: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the wisdom of his approach to this matter. The relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States was perhaps the single most important geopolitical fact of the last century, and I have no doubt that it will continue to prosper and thrive in the relationship we are building.

Gavin Newlands: Just as he has on Turkey, the Foreign Secretary has U-turned in his opinion of President-elect Trump. Given the openly racist and Islamophobic opinions expressed by some of Trump's Cabinet nominees, does the Foreign Secretary maintain his belief that there is a lot to be positive about in the new Administration, and how does he intend to work with his new counterpart to uphold universal human rights such as racial and gender equality?

Boris Johnson: I think that Members on both sides of this House should be as positive as we possibly can be about working with the incoming US Administration. It is of massive importance to our country and, indeed, to the world. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he should judge the new Administration by their actions in office, which we of course hope to shape and to influence.

Mr Speaker: I call James Cleverly.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I was going to ask question 13, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: It is far too early for question 13. If the hon. Gentleman wants to ask a question, it should be about the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States, but that now requires a certain dexterity and fleetness of foot from him.

13. [907414] **James Cleverly:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will ask a question.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that virtue signalling, while fashionable, is no basis for a productive international working relationship?

Boris Johnson: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his characteristic verbal dexterity. I think he speaks for many people—many common-sensical people—in this House and in this country who want a thriving relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): What representations has the Foreign Secretary made to our American counterparts about Aleppo, where bombing this weekend has caused the last children's hospital there to close?

Boris Johnson: As the hon. Lady knows—she has campaigned a great deal on this issue—we are working hand in glove with the United States to try to get a ceasefire in Aleppo. I last had a conversation with John Kerry on this matter very recently. Alas, it has proved impossible so far to persuade the Russians to drop their support for their Syrian client, but they have the opportunity to do just that. We need to reach out to the Russians and show that it is now up to them to demonstrate the leadership the world expects, to call for a ceasefire in Aleppo, to deliver a ceasefire in Aleppo, to let the humanitarian aid get through and to prevent a catastrophe for the people of that city over the winter months.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Although there is no vacancy, does not the Foreign Secretary think it is extremely generous of Donald Trump to suggest who should be our ambassador in the United States? In that spirit of fraternity, might he suggest that the best person to fill the vacancy for the ambassador to the United Kingdom next year would be Hillary Rodham Clinton, although I suspect the last thing she would want to do is to be associated with the incoming Administration?

Mr Speaker: I think the right hon. Gentleman might want to be the ambassador to the United States.

Boris Johnson: You anticipate what I was about to say, Mr Speaker. Of course, my right hon. Friend would

be a very good candidate. On the other hand, as the House knows full well, we have a first-rate ambassador in Washington doing a very good job of relating with the present Administration and the Administration to be. There is no vacancy for that position.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): As regards ambassadors for either country, may I make a suggestion? An excellent choice for the unofficial ambassador from the United States to Britain—I emphasise the word unofficial—would be Brandon Victor Dixon, the actor who spoke out to the Vice-President-elect about American values and was criticised by the future President. Mr Dixon is the sort of person who is associated with all that is best about the United States.

Boris Johnson: Of course, Mr Brandon Dixon, of whom, I am afraid, I was hitherto unaware is perfectly at liberty to come to this country, assuming that all visa requirements are met, and to spread his message. We look forward to having a new American ambassador in due course to follow in the footsteps, if I may say so, of one of the most distinguished US ambassadors we have seen in this country in recent years, Matthew Barzun.

Mr Speaker: I would have called the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), who has a very similar question, if he were standing, but he wasn't, so I won't.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: He is, so I might.

16. [907417] **Dr Poulter:** Diplomats require diplomacy. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there should be no place for anyone who expresses inflammatory views and views that could sometimes be considered to be bordering on racist in representing this country in discussions with the United States?

Boris Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who catches the mood of the House. We have already settled that question: we have an excellent ambassador in Washington who is doing a first-rate job and there is no vacancy.

12. [907413] **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary give a clear indication to the new US Administration that we value the Baltic states and their independence highly? As part of our responsibilities in NATO, will he support and encourage the new Administration to say the same things?

Boris Johnson: The right hon. Gentleman will know that that is one of our top priorities. As part of our global Britain campaign, we have an enhanced forward presence in the Baltic states and a battalion is being sent there. It is vital that we get over the message that NATO and article 5 of NATO have been the guarantor of peace and stability in our continent for the last 70 years. That is a point that is well understood in Washington, but which we will repeat.

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): I think we are all relieved that the Foreign Secretary has ruled out Mr Farage. In this post-truth world, we might have

assumed that he would have been sympathetic, given that they campaigned together so remarkably on Brexit. Will the Foreign Secretary outline to the House his thinking on what he will say when he visits the United States of America about our future relations, given that we have always been the conduit between Europe and the United States of America?

Boris Johnson: My right hon. Friend asks a thoughtful and important question because, as I said to the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), it is vital that we get our message across about the vital importance of NATO, of free trade and free enterprise, and of sticking up for the values that unite our two countries. That is the message that I know the Prime Minister will put across when she goes there, and it is certainly the message that will be delivered at all levels from the UK Government.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): In a secret telegram, printed in *The Sunday Times*, our ambassador “boasted that the UK is the best placed of any nation to steer the new president’s foreign policy and encourage his more extreme ideas to ‘evolve’.”

Is the presidential edict—or tweet—to replace Sir Kim Darroch with Lord Farage a sign of the early success of that policy?

Boris Johnson: I think the right hon. Gentleman is too early with his verdicts. We will engage with the Administration-to-be at all levels; indeed, we are already doing so, and I had a very good conversation with Vice-President-elect Mike Pence. We see eye to eye on a great many matters. As I have said, there is no ambassadorial vacancy in Washington given our excellent ambassador.

Alex Salmond: In the space of the past few weeks, the Foreign Secretary has gone from not going to New York in case he is mistaken for Mr Trump to saying that Mr Trump is the opportunity for the western world, a political pirouette of which Ed Balls would be proud. Will the Foreign Secretary realise what we are dealing with in the new President of the United States, and would this country’s policy not be helped by coherence, consistency and a bit of common sense?

Boris Johnson: I think that what the world needs now is the UK to build on its relations with the United States, which, as most people in the House accept, are of fundamental importance for our security. As I have said very candidly to hon. Members, there are three central points we will be making to our friends: the vital importance of the transatlantic alliance of NATO, the importance of free trade and free enterprise, and the importance of jointly promulgating the values that unite our two countries. That is the message.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): As we meet today on the 53rd anniversary of John F Kennedy’s death, we have the prospect of a very different president about to enter the White House in a matter of weeks. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State said last week, and has said again today, that this new president is “a liberal guy” with whom he shares many values. He does not end there; we have, he tells us, “every reason to be positive”

about a Trump presidency. Will he tell us what reasons there are to be positive about the attitude of the new president to climate change?

Boris Johnson: It is vital that we are as positive as we can possibly be about the new Administration-elect. As I have said to the House before, I believe that the UK-US relationship is vital, and I think that President-elect Trump is a deal maker. The UK has led on climate change globally, and we have had outstanding success. I will be open with the House that we will be taking to the Administration-to-be the message that we believe that the issue of climate change is important; it is of importance to the United States and the world.

Emily Thornberry: The reality is that we have a new president who says that climate change is a hoax invented by the Chinese, who has repeatedly promised to scrap the Paris treaty and whose top adviser on the environment calls global warming “nothing to worry about”. There is no doubt that that is a hugely dangerous development for the future of our planet, so let me ask the Secretary of State this: when the Prime Minister goes to see the new president in January, will she have the moral backbone to tell him that he is wrong on climate change and must not scrap the Paris treaty, and will she lead the world in condemning him if he does?

Boris Johnson: I really must say to the hon. Lady that she is being premature in her hostile judgments of the Administration-elect. Any such premature verdict could be damaging to the interests of this country. It is important that we in this country use our influence, which is very considerable, to help the United States to see its responsibilities, as I am sure it will.

Refugees

2. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What discussions he has had with his counterparts in the EU, Africa and the middle east on tackling the refugee situation in Europe and the middle east. [907402]

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): Ministerial colleagues and I regularly discuss migration with our European and international partners. The UK will continue to play a leading role towards securing a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to the migration crisis that tackles the causes as well as the consequences of unmanaged migration.

Michael Tomlinson: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer, but what reassurance can he give me and my constituents that he and the Prime Minister are working with the international community to help resolve this terrible situation?

Sir Alan Duncan: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave exactly that reassurance when she set out, at the United Nations in September, three key principles to improve the international response to the mass movement of refugees and migrants: the protection in the first safe country of arrival; the right of states to maintain their borders; and a clearer distinction between refugees and economic migrants. We are pursuing this agenda vigorously with our international colleagues.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Is the Minister aware of the rising levels of violence directed towards those in refugee camps on the island of Chios, including volunteers? Is he aware that on 16 November the camp at Souda was attacked by about 60 members of the far-right group New Dawn? Boulders were thrown into containers containing refugee women and children. Following that, three volunteers, two of whom are UK citizens, were arrested by the Greek police. Can he assure me that every support will be given to UK citizens volunteering in that area to ensure that their rights are protected?

Sir Alan Duncan: The right hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly fair point. I hope that everybody in this House fully condemns any such violence. Behind that bad news, however, there is some better news. Since the EU-Turkey agreement, the number of migrants arriving on Greek islands has reduced significantly from an average of about 1,500 in February to just over 100 a day now.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I believe that my right hon. Friend visited Turkey recently. Does he agree that Turkey plays an important role in helping refugees and managing the whole process, and that our relations with Turkey will become increasingly important in this regard?

Sir Alan Duncan: My hon. Friend is right. I have been to Turkey twice and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been there, too. The UK is committed to the successful implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement, which started in March this year. For that to work well, we need to retain good and constructive diplomatic engagement with countries, including Turkey.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Has the Minister had any pause for thought about the commitment of the UK Government and EU member states to engage and fund President Bashir's regime, as partners in the management of migration?

Sir Alan Duncan: The answer to that is no.

Iraq and Syria: Diplomatic Assistance

3. **Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): What role he plans that the UK will play in providing diplomatic assistance to help rebuild communities in Iraq and Syria. [907404]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): We will continue to support the Government of Iraq to deliver the reforms and reconciliation needed to build public trust and unite all Iraq's communities against extremism. In Syria, we continue to work in support of a lasting settlement based on transition away from Assad, and towards a stable and peaceful future for Syria.

Brendan O'Hara: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but in light of what happened in Libya, when a failure to plan for the future plunged the country and the region into absolute chaos, will he tell me what

lessons the UK learned from that experience and what his Department is doing to ensure a very different outcome in Iraq and Syria?

Boris Johnson: As the hon. Gentleman can imagine, a huge amount of work is going on now, particularly with respect to Mosul as I told the House at the previous Foreign Office questions. We announced a commitment to invest £169 million in aid towards reconciliation and bringing communities together. The House must understand, however, that fundamentally it is up to the Government of Iraq to work in a way that brings communities together, and builds trust and confidence in the people of Mosul and other parts of the country.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): What knowledge does the Foreign Secretary have of any plan for the political administration of Mosul after it is recaptured from Daesh, and what confidence does he have in any plan?

Boris Johnson: A huge body of work is being carried out at the moment, with the UN and the 68-nation coalition, to ensure that we have in place an administration that commands the confidence of all the people of Mosul. It will not be easy. The House understands perfectly well the problem—the forces set on liberating Mosul do not necessarily reflect the communities of that city. It will be a huge, huge challenge, but, as I said just now, that challenge must be met by the Government of Prime Minister Abadi and the Iraqis.

20. [907421] **Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP):** The United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs recently warned that medical facilities, especially trauma capacity, were being overwhelmed by civilian casualties in Mosul. What support are the UK Government offering to people trapped on the ground in that city by fighting on all sides?

Boris Johnson: As the liberating forces progress through the suburbs, we are ensuring that there are avenues out of the city and camps available for those who need to take refuge, but clearly this is a very delicate matter, and we are investing considerable sums in ensuring adequate protection.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): The Foreign Secretary rightly talks about the challenges of post-Daesh Mosul. I would like to mention on the record the excellent work that our ambassador, Frank Baker, is doing on politics beyond Daesh. Will my right hon. Friend make available to Frank and his team all the resources necessary to ensure we get the peace beyond Daesh right in Mosul?

Boris Johnson: My hon. Friend and I of course travelled to see Frank Baker a while ago, so we know what excellent work he does, and he has a very large team in Baghdad. It is a superb team and a real tribute to the work of the Foreign Office. As I say, they are working very hard to minimise the fallout from the liberation of Mosul and to ensure a peaceful and stable future for that city.

Leaving the EU: Bilateral Relations

4. **Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP):** What assessment has his Department made of the effect of the UK's decision to leave the EU on its bilateral relations with (a) EU and (b) non-EU countries. [907405]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): We are committed to strengthening the UK's bilateral relationships not just with the EU but across the world. We will deepen bilateral relationships with our natural partners, build new ones and work together to make the most of the opportunities ahead.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: At the weekend, the Prime Minister stated that she intended to update Chancellor Merkel on our Brexit preparations, and we know that the Business Secretary has already revealed the Government's plans to Nissan and that the Foreign Secretary himself was kind enough to brief the Czech press that we were leaving the customs unions. Why does everybody know more about the Government's plans than the elected representatives in this House, people across the United Kingdom and businesses in our constituencies that need and want to plan for the future?

Boris Johnson: The best advice I can give to the hon. Lady is that she study more closely the speeches of the Prime Minister, who has set out very clearly the fact that the UK will not be governed by EU law and that we will get the best possible deal, in trade in goods and services, for the benefit not just of this country but of the rest of the EU. Conservative Members are united behind the Prime Minister in achieving that aim.

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, for many countries in the eastern part of the EU, the largest issue at the moment is not Brexit but the potential threat from a resurgent Putin-led Russia? They are extremely grateful that the UK is right at the forefront of delivering troops to support the Baltic states and Poland.

Boris Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me, once again, to draw attention to global Britain's role in delivering an enhanced forward presence in the Baltic states, as my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary has said. That presence is of massive importance to those countries—[*Interruption.*] Opposition Members are interjecting from a sedentary position. This is one of the central points that we will be making to the incoming American Administration, and I am sure it is one that they already readily accept.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): I studied closely what the Prime Minister said yesterday at the CBI conference. She said:

“people don't want a cliff edge”.

It is encouraging that the Government are now acknowledging that in March 2019 we risk falling back on World Trade Organisation rules and tariffs. Following the Prime Minister's comments yesterday, will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the Government are looking at a

transitional deal that will give us time to negotiate a trade deal with the rest of the EU and to arrange other matters, such as security?

Boris Johnson: I do not want to accuse the hon. Lady of unnecessary pessimism, but I have no doubt whatever that this country can achieve exactly what the Prime Minister has set out, which is the best possible deal in trade in goods and services; and it will be win-win for both the UK and the EU.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that bilateral relations with non-EU countries such as America, Australia and Canada are extremely good and that those within the EU are extremely good as well, and now we have the opportunity to do a number of trade deals with all these countries? I understand that Tony Blair would like to help. Do you believe that he could have a role by banging the drum for Brand Britain around the world and accepting the fact that we are going to leave the European Union?

Mr Speaker: I believe neither that, nor the opposite.

Boris Johnson: My hon. Friend raises the issue of the support of the former Prime Minister. I am tempted to say “Nec tali auxilio, nec defensoribus istis” when it comes to our campaign. My hon. Friend is completely right: there is a huge opportunity not only for a deep and comprehensive deal with our friends and partners in the EU, but to seek new free trade deals around the world, and for this country to become once again the global champion and agitator for free trade.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): In between insulting the Italian Foreign Minister last week, showing that he has no understanding of the treaty of Rome, saying that he would not pressure Turkey over the death penalty and having a major bust-up with the head of the European People’s party, the Foreign Secretary managed to make one serious announcement. He told the Czech media that Britain would retain free trade with Europe, while leaving the customs union. Is that now the Government’s proposed plan and how does the Foreign Secretary intend to achieve it?

Boris Johnson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question, but I must direct him to the answer that I have already given, which is that the Prime Minister has set out very clearly in her speeches and remarks what we hope to achieve, and I think it eminently achievable. Contrary to the impression that the hon. Gentleman sought to give, more and more of our friends and partners around the EU are seeing the merits of what is being proposed, and more and more are excited. The hon. Gentleman asked about relations, so let me tell him that relations are excellent and getting warmer—not just in the EU, but around the world.

Bangladesh

5. **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the strength of diplomatic and economic relations between Bangladesh and the UK. [907406]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alok Sharma): The UK has strong diplomatic and economic relations with Bangladesh. We are the largest cumulative investor in the country and the largest bilateral grant donor. We also have close historical and cultural ties.

Maggie Throup: On Sunday, I attended the UK-Bangladesh catalysts of commerce and industry awards, which showcased the contribution that the Bangladeshi community makes to the economy here in Britain. As we look to strengthen our economic ties with countries outside the EU, does the Minister agree that we should continue to strengthen our trade relationships with countries such as Bangladesh?

Alok Sharma: There are half a million people of Bangladeshi heritage in the UK, and of course they make an immensely positive contribution to every aspect of British life. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that we should be doing even more to encourage bilateral trade and investment. She will be pleased to know that we are supporting the Government of Bangladesh to improve their business climate.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): After the fatal collapse of the Rana Plaza in 2013 and recent reports indicating that structural repairs remain incomplete and that buildings still lack fire exits and fire alarms, what discussions has the Minister had with his counterparts to ensure workplace safety measures for those working in global corporations in Bangladesh?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Lady raises a very important point. My colleagues in the Department for International Development are working on precisely those issues. As a Government, we take these sorts of issues very seriously.

West Bank

6. **Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): What discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on steps being taken to maintain order in the west bank. [907407]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Responsibility for security in the west bank is shared between the Palestinian authorities and the Israeli security forces, depending on whether we are talking about areas designated A, B or C. In my discussions with the Israeli authorities, I have encouraged this area to be transferred from C to B and B to A.

Lucy Allan: Israel and the Palestinian Authority continue to work together closely to maintain security in the west bank. Last month, however, a Palestinian Authority police-officer-turned-terrorist shot and wounded Israeli soldiers. Does the Minister agree that security co-operation is vital to maintaining stability, and will he join me in condemning the wave of attacks against Israelis that we have seen over the past year?

Mr Ellwood: I do join my hon. Friend in condemning those attacks, and I would encourage President Abbas and others in the Palestinian Authority to do so as well. We should not forget that more than 30,000 Palestinian

Authority security forces are working with Israeli defence forces to provide that security, and the Israeli defence forces rely on that to ensure that the west bank is kept as safe and secure as possible.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Does the Minister agree that the best way forward for both Israel and the Palestinian people would be a revival of the middle east peace process involving direct talks between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, and does he agree that all efforts should be directed towards achieving that?

Mr Ellwood: I entirely concur with the right hon. Gentleman. We have done our best to bring the parties back to the table, but, as he will know, there have been a number of difficult months. We need to ensure that there are confidence-building measures, and that people do not incite violence, which takes us further away than the direction of travel that he suggests.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Has the Minister walked the streets of Hebron which Palestinians may not use? We used to call that apartheid.

Mr Ellwood: In his lucid way, my right hon. Friend outlines the challenges that we face in Israel and, indeed, the west bank. It is important for us to ensure that the security measures of which we spoke in the context of the initial question are able to build that confidence so that we can bring people back to the table. I hope this is something that the American Administration will want to lean into.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): As we approach the centenary of the Balfour declaration, we must renew our commitment to both aspects of that historic statement: the preservation of the state of Israel as a safe and stable national home for the Jewish people, but also the protection of the “civil and religious rights of...non-Jewish communities in Palestine”. With that in mind, will the Minister make it clear today that the United Kingdom Government oppose proposals to legalise outposts in the west bank retrospectively, or to build new illegal settlements?

Mr Ellwood: We had a very frank and thorough debate about the history and context of the Balfour declaration only last week. However, the hon. Lady is right to say that the role that the settlements are playing undermines the message that is coming from Israel, and leads people to ask whether Israel is serious about a two-state solution. The longer the settlements continue to be built, the more difficult it becomes to envisage the possibility of such a solution.

Iraq

7. **Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): What discussions he has had with his Iraqi and other international counterparts on the political situation in Iraq. [907408]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Post-conflict states are potential incubators enabling emerging and existing groups to flourish, so it is important for the international community to work with Baghdad to

ensure that the complex and diverse make-up of Iraq is fully represented. I visited the country two weeks ago to see how governance was improving, but also to underline the United Kingdom's support.

Chris Green: Westminster Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and Bolton town hall will be lit up in red tomorrow to mark Red Wednesday, an Aid to the Church in Need initiative to highlight religious persecution in Iraq, in Syria, and around the world. Will the Minister join me in supporting Red Wednesday to raise awareness of those who are suffering injustice and risking their lives for their faith?

Mr Speaker: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that the Palace of Westminster will be lit up in red as well.

Mr Ellwood: I shall be more than delighted to join you, Mr Speaker, in welcoming and supporting that initiative.

We should not forget that the diverse make-up of Iraq, which I mentioned before, is part of its history, but so, unfortunately, is sectarian violence. After al-Qaeda was flushed out, the answer to allowing best representation in Baghdad in fact allowed Daesh to gain popularity and to dominate Fallujah, Mosul, Ramadi and other places. We must not revisit that by failing to ensure that there is full representation across the piece in Baghdad.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): What conversations have the Minister and the Foreign Secretary had with their counterparts in Iraq about a power-sharing agreement in the Mosul region, including Tal Afar, to ensure that we secure the peace after the liberation of the city and the region?

Mr Ellwood: I think the Foreign Secretary touched on this, and it was very much the focus of my attention when I visited the country last week. The way the liberation will move is that the east side of the city, on the right-hand side of the Tigris, will be liberated first, and there are plans for ward breakdowns to make sure there are the necessary leaders to come in to provide that security and make sure improvised explosive devices are removed and get the water supplies working and the place itself safe. It will take time, and this needs to be an Iraqi-led process, but the international community, through the United Nations Development Programme, is working very hard to make sure it is a success.

West Bank

8. **Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): What recent representations he has made to his Israeli counterpart on the announcement by the Prime Minister of Israel of a new settlement at Shiloh in the west bank in October 2016. [907409]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): On 5 October, I issued a press statement condemning the announcement of the proposed settlement in Shiloh. In September, I met Defence Minister Lieberman and raised our concerns about settlements, and made it clear that unless they form part of a land swap anyone living there must live with the knowledge that they will

one day have to move. That was accepted by Defence Minister Lieberman, who is living in one of the settlements himself.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Does the Minister not therefore agree with me that a pillar of liberal democracy and the peace it brings is the rule of law, and that by reactively legalising illegal settlements on Palestinian land the Government of Benjamin Netanyahu continue to undermine democracy and progress to a lasting peace in the middle east?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman touches on a process in which these illegal settlements become legal, and we have raised concerns about this.

The settlement of Shiloh is significant because it allows an extension of the settlement area east of Ariel, which essentially, between Nablus and Ramallah, cuts off or breaks the west bank from the River Jordan all the way to Green Israel. That means effectively ruling out the possibility of a two-state solution.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will Her Majesty's Government use the opportunity of the centenary next year of the Balfour declaration to be bold and launch a peace initiative of their own to solve all these issues of settlements, security and the whole Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Mr Ellwood: As I mentioned in the Westminster Hall debate on the Balfour declaration, we will be announcing plans as to how we will mark the year. It is also the anniversary of the mandate for Israel and Palestine and the withdrawal of Britain from the area. Also, we should not forget that it is almost 25 years since the Oslo accords, and therefore there is more work to be done. This is an international effort; it is also an effort that requires the Palestinians and the Israelis to work together, and we stand ready to provide support and make this happen.

Israel-Palestine Conflict

9. **Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab):** What discussions he has had with the US Government on a UN Security Council resolution on the Israel-Palestine conflict. [907410]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The Foreign Secretary regularly discusses matters relating to the middle east peace process with the US Secretary of State. At the UN General Assembly in September, I attended the ministerial meeting with other foreign leaders, and this issue came up when I spoke to John Kerry this Sunday evening.

Helen Hayes: The US election result has created a new sense of urgency in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Will the Foreign Secretary set out what he is doing to secure a new UN resolution before 20 January, and beyond that date how the Government will be seeking to ensure that genuine progress is made towards a two-state solution and real and lasting peace for Palestinians and Israelis?

Mr Ellwood: For all the reasons I have spelled out before, there is a sense of urgency: the people of Palestine, and indeed the people of Israel, want this to happen. However, we have to wait for the new Trump Administration to embed itself, and we also make it clear that of course there is merit at the right moment in a balanced UN Security Council resolution which sets out the parameters for a workable, viable settlement leading to that two-state solution based on the clear and internationally agreed parameters, but it must command the full support of the Security Council.

17. [907418] **Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con):** The comments in the House make clear the anxiety felt by colleagues on all sides that the peace process should not be allowed to drift still further. The greatest danger is not to keep bringing it forward, and we must keep trying to make sure that the parties most closely involved understand that they have worse enemies than each other now in the region. That is why this time must be taken either to put forward a new resolution or to support the French initiative, but certainly not to give people the sense that somehow this can just be managed and will go away.

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend is wise in what he says. We need to ensure that we grasp this opportunity. President Abbas is actually somebody we can work with, and we should remember that he will not be there forever. What will happen after him is not clear, and we need to ensure that we can work towards a two-state solution, but I want to make it clear that as things stand at the moment, the situation looks very bleak indeed.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree that a resolution can be helpful only if it leads to direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians? Does he agree that it is most unhelpful that the Palestinian Authority has recently named a fourth school after Salah Khalaf, the person who masterminded the murder of 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics?

Mr Ellwood: I have commented on this matter before, and I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady that this is just inciting hatred and taking us away from the direction we want to go in. It is important that we should be able to get back to the table. We touch on these matters, but they are highly complicated. The role of Hamas in relation to the Palestinian Authority needs to be observed and considered. The other Arab nations can help in that regard. The difficulty is that the position that Prime Minister Netanyahu's current coalition is working towards is also a consideration. The support of the United States is also critical. These are difficult matters, and I hope that, on the Balfour declaration anniversary next year, we will not be looking back 100 years. Instead, I hope that it will be a marker, and that we will be able to look forward to moving in a positive direction.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the central principle in the middle east peace process has to be direct talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians in order to reach a two-state solution? Does he also agree that those negotiations need to take place on the basis of no preconditions?

Mr Ellwood: I absolutely concur with my hon. Friend. However, there are some Israelis who believe that the Palestinians will never accept the Israelis' right to live in peace in a Jewish state and that they are teaching hate and glorifying terrorists. They think that the west bank will simply be turned into Gaza. On the other side, there are Palestinians who believe that the Israeli Government will never give them the state that they are working towards. We need to bury those myths. That is not what the people of Israel or the people of Palestinian actually want.

Ebrahim Sharif

10. **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): What representations his Department has made to the Government of Bahrain on charges brought against Ebrahim Sharif for conducting an interview with Associated Press in November 2016. [907411]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I met my counterpart, the Foreign Minister Khalid al-Khalifa, this weekend, and our ambassador in Manama raised the case of Ebrahim Sharif on 16 November. We will continue to monitor the case very carefully indeed.

Margaret Ferrier: The US State Department has defended freedom of expression and explicitly called for the charges against Ebrahim Sharif to be dropped, whereas the Foreign Office has merely expressed concern. Does the Minister believe that such prevarication will convince the Government of Bahrain to drop those charges?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady touches on a matter on which I feel I am developing a relationship with the Scottish National party. The United Kingdom and the United States have different relationships with Bahrain in terms of the style, the approach and the strategy that we use to influence countries in the Gulf and to advance the democratic process. We have a closer relationship with Bahrain, in which we can have frank conversations. We might not have put out a press statement on this matter—we might not have made the headlines in that sense—but I can assure her that we are having frank conversations with the aim of improving policing, the rule of law and democratic rights. This is happening; the hon. Lady just does not see it all the time.

Incoming US Administration: NATO

11. **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the incoming US Administration on their policy on article 5 of the NATO treaty. [907412]

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan) *rose*—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I want to do it. [*Laughter.*]

Sir Alan Duncan: Let the little guy get a word in for once!

Throughout the election period, our embassy in Washington engaged both campaigns across the breadth of our policy interests, including NATO.

Toby Perkins: I agree with the Foreign Secretary that we should encourage all NATO allies to spend 2% of their GDP on defence, but will the Minister take this opportunity to send a message to President-elect Trump and to President Putin that article 5 is sacrosanct and not in any way conditional on our allies' spending levels?

Sir Alan Duncan: I confirm that we strongly support the leaving in of article 5 as the bedrock of NATO and support NATO as the bedrock of European and wider defence interests.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Russians' stationing of new ballistic missiles in Kaliningrad is curious given that it will probably unite NATO members, the United States in particular, around article 5?

Sir Alan Duncan: NATO is taking necessary and proportionated steps—balanced with dialogue—to strengthen defence and deterrents in response to Russian belligerence. At Warsaw, NATO announced an enhanced forward presence, which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has already referenced today, in Poland and the Baltic states. The UK will lead in Estonia, providing an infantry battalion of 800 troops from May of next year.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): May I come back to article 5? The principle that an attack on one NATO country is an attack on all is the cornerstone on which the alliance is built. At a time when the Baltic states are rightly concerned about Russian expansionism, that principle is now more important than ever. Will the Minister make it clear today that article 5 is an inviolable right for all NATO members, not something that is contingent on how much they spend on defence?

Sir Alan Duncan: I can repeat my having said just that. July's NATO summit demonstrated the commitment of all allies to article 5, and I can confirm that again today.

Incoming US Administration: Iran Nuclear Agreement

14. **Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the incoming US Administration on their policy on the nuclear agreement with Iran. [907415]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): The Government remain committed to the nuclear deal with Iran, and we look forward to working with the new Administration in the United States to ensure that it is a success.

Gerald Jones: As the Foreign Secretary may know, people sometimes say things during election campaigns that are falsehoods or exaggerations in order to win. Can he provide any assurance that that was the case when President-elect Trump called the agreement with Iran “the worst deal ever negotiated”?

Boris Johnson: I am not going to get into a commentary on the election campaign that has just taken place in the United States. All I can say is that we in this Government

think that there is merit in the deal. There has been a considerable increase in trade with Iran since sanctions were lifted—a 40% increase in UK trade. Deals have recently been announced by Lotus and Vodafone, so we should be positive about our engagement and keep the thing on the road.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The agreement with Iran was hard won and hugely important both to remove the threat of Iran gaining nuclear weapons and to start a process of normalising relations with Tehran. Even those who originally opposed the deal, such as Prime Minister Netanyahu, now urge President-elect Trump not to tear it up. Can I press the Secretary of State to join those calls today and make it clear that the deal must continue to be honoured by all sides?

Boris Johnson: I repeat the point that I just made. We believe in this deal. We think it is good. We are making progress. As the hon. Lady will know, we recently reopened the UK embassy in Tehran. Ambassador Nicholas Hopton is now in post and doing a very good job—although if other people want to volunteer for that post, I suppose they are always welcome to do so. He is using that opportunity to develop our relations with Tehran, which will be of increasing importance in the years ahead. That is a point that we will make to our friends in Washington and worldwide.

Topical Questions

T1. [907366] **Stuart Blair Donaldson** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): My immediate priority is to build a strong relationship with the incoming US Administration with the aim of making progress on our shared goals at every level of the international agenda. Foremost among them are vanquishing Daesh, responding to the crisis in Syria and standing firm against the challenge from Russia.

Stuart Blair Donaldson: According to figures released last week, Scotland has taken over a third of the Syrian refugees in the UK to date. However, the UK Government plan to take only a third as many as Sweden by 2020. How does the Foreign Secretary explain to his counterparts in Europe the UK's shirking of its responsibilities?

Boris Johnson: I must reject the hon. Gentleman's assertion that this country is not doing enough to help the people of Syria or the region. As he will know fine well, this country is the second biggest global donor to the response to the humanitarian crisis in that region, and we can be proud of our record in giving humanitarian support there, and in offering sanctuary and refuge here in the UK.

T2. [907367] **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): Israel is often criticised for its strict control of the border with Gaza, yet Egypt has closed its border completely. Will the Minister update me on any discussions he has had with Egypt about its border with Gaza?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): This is an important point. President Sisi is very conscious of the challenges that Egypt is facing from its own extremists, and Britain is providing support on that. In the longer term, there will be plans for the border to reopen. Unfortunately, many of the tunnel systems were used to smuggle in to Hamas equipment that was being used against Israel, but the strength of the relationship between Israel and Egypt is allowing them to co-ordinate things to make sure that that is curtailed.

T4. [907369] **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): It has been widely reported that the Foreign Secretary had to write to the Culture Secretary after she suggested that the UK should abandon hosting the 2023 European capital of culture. My constituency of Dundee has spent a huge amount of time and money preparing a leading bid for the title, which would bring a multi-million European boost to my city, as well as a major lift for tourism, and for social and economic development. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm whether he has had a reply to his letter? Will he today give me his personal commitment that the competition will go ahead as planned?

Boris Johnson: As I repeatedly told the House, we may be leaving the EU but we are not leaving Europe, and we are certainly not leaving the EU for a small time to come. In that time, we are fully paid-up members and it is my view that we should take part to the full, including in such cultural co-operation as the hon. Gentleman describes—and we will do so. We will also continue to take part in such European cultural ventures beyond our exit from the EU.

T3. [907368] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary believe that a radical free marketeer, admirer of Mrs Thatcher, opponent of Maastricht, Catholic, social conservative cannot be an entirely bad egg? So will he give his felicitations to François Fillon for his progress so far in the presidential elections—after all, he is a great anglophile—and in doing so underline that our priority must be good relations with our nearest and dearest ally?

Mr Speaker: Until the hon. Gentleman named the name, I thought he was about to make a job application.

Boris Johnson: It is wonderful to hear of a senior French politician, who is married to a British wife—*[Interruption.]* A Welsh wife, indeed. I hesitate to blight Monsieur Fillon's chances by offering him my congratulations or my support at this stage.

T5. [907370] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Thed Bedouin village in the Negev of Umm al-Hiran was due to be demolished today, despite the Bedouin having lived there since they were wrongfully displaced from their own land in 1956. That contrasts with the expansion of settlements in the west bank. I worked in Gaza 25 years ago, at the time of the Oslo accord. A quarter of a century on, what is the Minister doing to get us back on track?

Mr Ellwood: May I just confirm whether this is a Bedouin camp that is inside green-line Israel—

Dr Whitford indicated assent.

Mr Ellwood: It is. The rules are different, depending on whether or not Bedouin camps are in the west bank or in Israel proper. Nevertheless, the necessary support measures must be given to those people if they are going to be moved. I visited a Bedouin camp the last time I was there, and I will be looking at this particular announcement and making a statement on this later today.

T6. [907371] **James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): Following the Foreign Secretary's recent visit to the western Balkans, what assessment has he made of the UK role in providing stability to that area?

Boris Johnson: As hon. Members will know, the UK played a crucial role in bringing an end to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. As my hon. Friend knows well, there are people across that region who look to us for encouragement and support, and we will be hosting a western Balkans summit here in London in 2018 to try to encourage further stability and confidence building in that region.

T7. [907372] **Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): There are few things more patriotic than paying our taxes, but the Foreign Office governs a network of tax havens that shield some individuals and some companies from paying their fair share. Will the Foreign Secretary set a deadline for when UK-governed jurisdictions have at least to have the same transparency as here in the UK?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Alok Sharma): As the hon. Gentleman will know, this Government have done an enormous amount in tackling tax evasion, and, as a result, have collected enormous amounts of funds. Ultimately, these matters are for the Treasury, and I am sure that he will have the opportunity to put those questions at Treasury questions.

T9. [907374] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Despite the fantastic efforts of campaigns such as the Great Big Rhinos project run by Paignton zoo, the decline in endangered species across the world is alarming, particularly in the African elephant and the rhino. Given the need for a more co-ordinated international effort to tackle this decline, can the Minister confirm the outcome of the recent Hanoi conference and what action the UK Government are taking in response?

Boris Johnson: As my hon. Friend will know, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been taking the lead in Hanoi in urging the international community to take tougher measures against elephant and rhino poachers. The figures are heartbreaking. In the late 1990s, there were 1.2 million elephants in the world. In Africa, the figure is now down to 300,000. In fact, it has gone down 120,000 since 2010. It is a catastrophic loss for Africa and for the world, and the UK is leading the fightback. We will be holding a summit on the conservation of endangered wildlife in London in the next couple of years.

T8. [907373] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Prime Minister will attend the Gulf Cooperation Council leaders' summit next month as

a guest of honour. Does she intend to use the opportunity to push for greater information-sharing with the UK from Saudi-led coalition operations in Yemen so that UK defence personnel are able to form a complete understanding of the coalition's regard for international humanitarian law?

Boris Johnson: We are very honoured that our Prime Minister is the first female Prime Minister to be invited to attend the GCC in the Gulf. It emphasises the very strong relations that we have with that area. This Government are doing everything they can to satisfy themselves of the compliance of Gulf countries, notably of Saudi Arabia, with the principles of international humanitarian law.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Following the decision of the Indian Government to withdraw the 500 and 1,000 rupee notes, what efforts has the Minister made to ensure that British citizens of Indian descent are able to exchange their money?

Alok Sharma: As my hon. Friend will know, it is for the Indian Government and the Reserve Bank of India to define what is Indian legal tender. However, I can say that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has updated its travel advice, advising British nationals travelling to India how to act in this matter, and we advise those nationals to monitor the situation closely.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): What is the Foreign Secretary doing to secure the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe?

Boris Johnson: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that the Foreign Office is in regular contact with the Iranian Government at all levels. The matter has been raised by the Prime Minister with President Rouhani, and by me with Foreign Minister Zarif. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) has only recently had meetings on that very subject. The matter is of the utmost priority for this Government, and we are doing our level best to resolve it.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Talks on the future of Cyprus have broken down without agreement. As one of the guarantor powers, can the Minister advise what the Government will do to try to influence the situation and to enable the talks to continue?

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): It is an exaggeration to say that the talks have totally broken down, but they have stalled for the moment, and we are giving every possible support that we can to enable the talks to continue in the hope that they can yet reach a successful conclusion for the reunification of the island.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Will the Minister assure us that the UK will continue to assist in the gathering of evidence for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria, so that, eventually, those responsible for these terrible atrocities will be brought to book?

Boris Johnson: I can reassure the right hon. Lady, who I know has campaigned on this issue for many years, that the initiative that we started in September at

the UN General Assembly with the Belgians and other countries continues to work well. We are gathering the evidence that we need, and I am confident that in due course we will bring Daesh operatives to justice.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): All countries of the EU, with the exception of the United Kingdom, have resumed direct flights to Sharm el-Sheikh, which are so vital to the Egyptian economy. What more do the Egyptian Government have to do to persuade the Government to resume direct flights?

Boris Johnson: This has been a very difficult matter. As the House will know, the Egyptian Government are strongly desirous of our resuming flights to Sharm el-Sheikh. Unfortunately, we are not yet able to do so. Perhaps the best I can say is that consultations and work are still going on between our two Governments and between our security services to give the UK Government the reassurance that they need.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): In South Africa, black people were not able to vote, all political opposition was outlawed, and different races could not even get married. In Israel, there is freedom of movement, assembly and speech, all governmental institutions are integrated, and all citizens can vote, so is it not a disgrace and an insult to the middle east's only democracy and to the black people who suffered under apartheid to hear Israel described as that, as we have heard a former Minister do this afternoon?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman makes two separate points, and we need to consider both distinctively. I will be visiting South Africa in the new year and I will be looking at some of the election processes that take place. We are supportive of both countries, but in the

case of Israel, it is a democratic country in a very tough neighbourhood and Britain stands by our friendship. We are an ally of Israel and long may that continue.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): What discussions have the Government had with their counterparts about the very dangerous political crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

Mr Ellwood: I visited the DRC during the summer, and I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has done in that regard. As in other parts of Africa, there is a president who does not want to honour the constitution and wants to stay on longer. We request that he recognises the constitution and stands back. We need the electoral commission to complete its work so that there is an updated electoral register and fresh elections can take place. We hope that happens soon.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Ind): My constituent, Helen Veevers, faces allegations in Kenya that she conspired to poison her father. She is concerned that she could be the victim of police corruption in that country. Can the Minister reassure me that the Foreign Office is making representations and will keep a close eye on the situation?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that this is a very delicate case indeed. We are providing consular support. I do not believe it is in anyone's best interests for us to expand any further on the details. I would be more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman directly after Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions to say what more is happening.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to disappoint remaining colleagues, but demand today has been exceptionally high. We must now move on.

Organ Donors (Leave)

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

12.38 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend Part 8 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 to make provision about leave for persons donating body organs for transplant; and for connected purposes.

I start by sending my thanks and, I am sure, the thanks of the whole House to the nurses and medical staff who make up the NHS Blood and Transplant service and the staff who run the NHS organ donation register. It is a relatively small team in the grand scheme of things, but it is thanks to their effort and their utter brilliance that thousands of lives are saved each year which may otherwise have been lost, and it is thanks to their ingenuity and dedication that last year organ donations in the UK reached a record high. The difference they are making to families whose loved ones have been given a new chance at life often goes unsaid.

I would also like to take this opportunity to note the work of hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) and for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies), who have put the issue of organ donation firmly on the parliamentary agenda in recent years.

Organ donation is improving year on year, in part due to small changes such as the option for someone to sign up when they renew their driving licence. Last year alone, that method saw an extra half a million people register to become potentially life-saving donors. These are small changes that are making a huge difference. However, as the NHS Blood and Transplant service has said, there is an awful lot of work to be done not only to raise consent figures—currently at 62%, despite evidence suggesting that over 90% of the public would give their organs in death—but to encourage families to have that difficult conversation about what they would do if the unthinkable happened.

Family refusal after the death of a loved one is, sadly, the single biggest barrier to organ donation. Of course, it is completely understandable and natural that, in the aftermath of a life-changing loss, all that people want to do is to preserve what is left behind, but if 80% of families consented 1,000 more lives a year could be saved and 1,000 more families kept together. So I would like to take this opportunity gently to urge families to have that conversation, to find out their loved one's wishes and to tell them theirs, because the chances are that, if the unthinkable happened, their loved one would want to save a life.

While much of the focus is rightly dedicated to those brave families who have made that difficult decision, living donors should also be hailed for their selflessness in giving a kidney, part of their liver or bone marrow to save the life of someone they may never even have met. It is living donors for whom my Bill would guarantee legal rights they have so far not enjoyed.

Six thousand people nationwide are currently going through the utter agony of waiting for the call that could save their lives, but, year in, year out, the availability of those organs never matches need. Living organ donors are playing their very significant part in bridging that

heart-breaking gap. Last year alone, over 1,000 of them donated part of their liver or a kidney, and many more donated their bone marrow.

The criteria for organ donors mean many are often of working age and in work. It hardly needs saying, but giving an organ is an enormous commitment, and if someone is an employee, the time needed off work may give them pause for thought. The NHS advises that living donors can expect to need up to 12 weeks' recovery time. This will vary from person to person, and depending on what job they do, but the point is that this is a very serious commitment for any would-be donor.

People have to weigh up whether they can afford to take that time off if their boss insists they take it unpaid and if they have to wait for any compensation to come through from the relevant NHS trust. They have to weigh up whether they can make the commitment to be out of work for that length of time. They are also always worrying in case their position or their terms and conditions are not quite the same on their return as when they left. That uncertainty is unacceptable. It is putting barriers in the path of people becoming life-saving donors. Currently, the law has nothing to say.

The issue was brought to my attention by a man who told me he had donated bone marrow to an anonymous blood cancer patient. He was allowed just three days off work—unpaid—to cover the time in hospital. He felt pressured to return, and he was accused of “making himself sick” by his employer. That is just one example, but it tells us of the pressures faced by workers who may want to donate.

Any and all barriers standing in the way of living donors must be dismantled. The lack of legal employment protections, which is holding back these potential life-savers, is significant, and it can be easily corrected by Government. That time out of the workplace may completely deter young people, in particular, who have the highest likelihood of donating high-quality bone marrow.

That is why my Bill will guarantee living organ donors the right to paid time off to allow them to recover, safe in the knowledge that they will not be financially penalised and that their job will be waiting for them when they return. An employee will not be checking their phone, worried they may get a call off the boss, or rushing back to work because they are worried they should be there. Instead, they can have the time off that they need to get better and that they so deserve for having saved a life.

The Bill will also guarantee that employees' terms and conditions and their rights are the same on their return as when they left. In an age where workers feel increasingly insecure in their jobs, and where, at the sharp end of the economy, unscrupulous employment practices are rife, these legal guarantees could make the difference between donating or not. We are already chronically short of donors, and we should be clearing every conceivable barrier put in the way of these potential life savers. I am delighted that major businesses such as my own former employer, Aviva, and the DIY retailer, Wickes, back my call. It is fantastic that a cross-party group of MPs, including the Chair of the Health Committee, is supporting it as well.

Each donation is an astonishing story of bravery in its own right and a life-changing moment for the individuals and families who benefit from that generosity. As work gets increasingly precarious, employees must rely on the

protections in law that guarantee their rights. These guarantees will not only bring peace of mind but help to increase the number of living donors from 1,000 and bridge the gap between availability and need. Crucially, this will send a clear signal from Government, and from this House, that if you are prepared to give an organ to save a life, the law will back you every step of the way.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Louise Haigh, Steve McCabe, Will Quince, Jim Shannon, Catherine West, Ms Margaret Ritchie and Dr Sarah Wollaston present the Bill.

Louise Haigh accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January 2017 and to be printed (Bill 96).

Opposition Day

[13TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Education and Social Mobility

Mr Speaker: We now come to the Opposition day motion on education and social mobility. I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. I should advise the House that a very substantial number of Back Benchers have applied to speak—no fewer than 28, if memory serves. Realistically, I imagine, the debate will not run beyond 4 pm or, at the latest, 4.30 pm. Of course there is no time limit on Front-Bench speeches. Front Benchers tend to take significant numbers of interventions, perfectly properly, and that is favoured by the House, but I am sure that those on both Front Benches will wish to tailor their contributions in the light of what I have said.

12.47 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House believes that every child throughout the UK must be given the opportunity to reach their full potential; further believes that there is no evidence that additional academic selection in the school system will improve social mobility; and calls on the Government to instead concentrate on providing the best education possible for all children.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I hope to be brief but substantive in my comments. I start by thanking the emergency services across the UK who helped many of our constituents during the floods yesterday, particularly my constituents and businesses across Tameside and Oldham.

It should be the duty of all Governments to provide the best education for every child. Today we call on the whole House to show that it shares this commitment. Only last Wednesday, we heard that Britain has a “deep social mobility problem”; that for this generation of young people, in particular, it is getting worse, not better; and that this is the result of an unfair education system, a two-tier labour market, an imbalanced economy, and an unaffordable housing market. That is not an accusation from the Opposition, but the conclusion of the Government’s own Social Mobility Commission. The commission made many recommendations on how we can offer the best start in life for every child— but, crucially, new academic selection was not one of them.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): Will the hon. Lady inform the House of precisely how many grammar schools she visited as shadow Education Secretary before deciding to oppose the policy in the Green Paper and lay this motion?

Angela Rayner: As a parent, as a school governor, and as a Member who used to represent trade union members, I have visited many grammar schools. My contribution to this debate will be based on fact and evidence. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will look at the facts and evidence and vote accordingly. In fact, the Social Mobility Commission offered a clear recommendation to abandon any plans for further academic selection. It did so because it knows that social mobility

[Angela Rayner]

is facing a crisis and that further academic selection is simply not the answer; in fact, it will only entrench the problem.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Could the hon. Lady explain why it is right for my constituents to be able to go to a grammar school in Birmingham but not to be able to go to a grammar school in Brierley Hill, because there is no existing provision there?

Angela Rayner: In my contribution, I hope to explain exactly why we need to move away from selection and towards inclusion in our education system.

The conclusions of the Social Mobility Commission will find much support in this House, not just among Opposition Members but, I hope, among Government Members as well. We still have not heard from the Prime Minister whether any of the recommendations will be adopted.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Before we have to listen to the sixth-form debating points from Conservative Members, does my hon. Friend agree that what they ought to do is to set out the evidence for this policy? They should tell us where these schools will be, how many of them there will be, how much the policy will cost, how these schools will select their pupils, where the resources will come from, what the pupils will learn and how the schools will differ from existing ones.

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. There are clearly many questions to be answered about the evidence for such a policy.

I want to give the Education Secretary the chance to end this uncertainty in our school system. Can she tell us which of the commission's recommendations she will be accepting, and whether the Government have rejected the recommendation on schools, in particular? The challenges that we face as a country go much further than this one misguided policy.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): Last year in Ashfield 66% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds did not get five A* to C GCSEs. We are the 13th lowest constituency at sending 18-year-olds to higher education. That is the real scandal, is it not—not the grammar school proposals?

Angela Rayner: I thank my hon. Friend for her absolutely splendid intervention, because we know that increasing selection is not the answer to the crisis that is facing our school system.

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): Is it not a fact that the demand for grammar schools is coming from wealthy parents who are seeing private education become more and more priced out of their reach, with fees of more than £21,000 a year? It is a fact that there are four times more children from privately paid prep schools getting into grammar schools than there are kids from state schools. Surely we should not let people get an elite education on the cheap, paid for by the taxpayer.

Angela Rayner: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. The report by the Social Mobility Commission that came out last week stated that the people who were

finding it hardest to progress were not just the most disadvantaged, but those earning around £22,000 a year. Those are the hard-working families—the people who are just getting by—that this Prime Minister pledged to support on the steps of 10 Downing Street. I want to find common cause with Members from all parts of the House and all parties in making Britain a country in which every child gets an excellent education and the best start in life.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): When the hon. Lady goes to watch one of our best sports teams, does she think that it is a problem that its members were selected and given an elite education?

Angela Rayner: The right hon. Gentleman knows that this is a completely different issue. I say to him, as I say to all hon. Members from across the House, “Follow the evidence.”

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Talking of excellence in sport, does my hon. Friend agree that we should celebrate the fact that Mo Farah, who grew up and went to a state school in my constituency, has succeeded on the world stage? The school that he attended is now suffering from cuts, which mean that it is referring more than 40% of its pupils for mental health support services.

Mr Speaker: He is also a staunch Arsenal fan, which makes him an even greater man.

Angela Rayner: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. We need to make sure that every child, regardless of their background, makes the best progress in life. We know that selection is not the way forward.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Angela Rayner: I am going to make some progress before I take any more interventions.

I want to find common cause, and I know that many Government Members agree with me that expanding academic selection is hardly the best way to ensure that every child makes the best progress. Members of all parties know that all the evidence tells us that providing an excellent education starts at the earliest point. Access to childcare and early years education is absolutely vital, not just in helping children, but in helping every family to fulfil its potential. Indeed, by the time they would take the 11-plus, children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are already, on average, 10 months behind. The evidence shows that investment in early years is the best way to close the attainment gap between the most disadvantaged children and their affluent peers.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree with David Cameron, who said:

“There is a kind of hopelessness about the demand to bring back grammars on the assumption that this country will only ever be able to offer a decent education to a select few”?

Angela Rayner: I find myself agreeing with the former Prime Minister, who was elected to make those contributions to the debate. That was the platform and the manifesto on which the Conservative Government stood, which they are currently rejecting.

I know from personal experience, as will parents from across this Chamber, the incredible impact that childcare can have, not just on children and their education, but on entire families. Leaving school at 16, with no qualifications and a newborn son, Labour's Sure Start centres helped me to learn to be a better parent to my son. I know that I would not be speaking in this House today without those programmes, and that they have helped to offer my son the opportunities I never had growing up.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): What would the hon. Lady say to parents in my constituency and in the rest of Croydon—where there are no grammar schools—who have to travel for miles and miles to an adjacent grammar school in either Sutton or Bromley? She is seeking to deny those parents choice, is she not?

Angela Rayner: I am seeking to ensure that every child has the best opportunities in life and a great start. I do not want the hon. Gentleman's constituents to have to travel miles away from his constituency; I want them to have absolutely the best education possible, and selection does not provide that for every child.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an outstanding opening speech. Does she agree that in this debate the point about choice is really a non-starter? The choice lies not with the parents, but with the school. The school gets to choose the kids; the parents do not get to choose the school. Invariably, the school chooses the children on their financial and social wellbeing rather than on anything else.

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I pay tribute to her for the outstanding work that she did when she was on the Front Bench.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Angela Rayner: I am going to make some more progress.

The Social Mobility Commission talked about treadmill families, who are running fast but are stuck in the same place, and who are working hard but do not have anything to show for it at the end of the week. Childcare and early years intervention will do far more to address those problems than would a focus on new academic selection at age 11. Yet we have seen the closure of more than 800 Sure Start centres since 2010, the loss of around 45,000 childcare places and the closure of 1,000 childcare providers in the last five years.

There are similar challenges facing our existing schools. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that our schools are facing the first real-terms cuts to their budgets in nearly two decades, just as demand for school places is growing. We already know the consequences: more staff leaving, more schools in disrepair and more courses being cut. The Department for Education has missed its teacher training targets for four years in a row, while more experienced teachers are leaving the profession in record numbers and half a million pupils are being taught in super-sized classes. It should be our mission to provide an excellent education for all children, and we know what is needed to provide that: high-quality

early years education, and the best heads and teachers teaching the right curriculum to manageable classes in decent school buildings, with high standards and good behaviour.

Let me say to the Education Secretary and all Government Members that if they take serious action to make the changes our education system needs, I will be the first to support them, because education policy should not be about ideological dogma, but about looking at all the evidence and pursuing policies that will improve the lives of all children.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that the academy programme has delivered considerable success? Will she give it her unequivocal support, and will she condemn the members of the National Union of Teachers who picketed the Kimberley School in my constituency when it had the temerity to break free of the local authority and establish an excellent academy?

Angela Rayner: Education—I hope we can agree on this—is not about the vehicle, but about the drivers. Focusing on the vehicle does not deal with the fundamental issues of collaboration, leadership and good teaching in our school system.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Angela Rayner: I will make some more progress.

The purpose of today's debate is to send a message that Members from all parties are committed to an evidence-based approach to education policy, not to pursuing the failed policy of academic selection. We know that such a policy is not the answer to Britain's social mobility crisis, and the Government knew that, too, until very recently. Indeed, the former leader of the Conservative Party—the one who won an election—had explicitly promised not to do so: only just gone, but so quickly forgotten. Why has that pledge been ripped up by the new Prime Minister? The Education Secretary has said it is to help solve Britain's social mobility crisis, but the evidence for that is scant. I will not recite this point at length, but that was conclusively demonstrated in the recent Back-Bench business debate, which focused precisely on the evidence, secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) and the hon. Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), the Chair of the Education Committee.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Angela Rayner: I am not going to take interventions on that point. I will make some progress.

We know that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to get into selective schools, even if they are just as bright as their better-off peers, and we know that even if they do get in, the impact on their attainment is minimal at best. It is not just Labour Members who know it; dozens of the Education Secretary's own Back Benchers know it. The greatest concerns are about the mistaken priorities revealed by this policy.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Angela Rayner: I want to make some progress, because I will wrap up shortly.

In the consultation document launched in November, the Government have already pledged £50 million to help existing grammar schools to expand. The same Green Paper made a series of substantial, uncosted pledges to schools that want to become grammars or to academy chains that want to open them. Now, just this weekend, Government sources briefed *The Sunday Times* that there will be “tens of millions” more to help grammar schools to expand.

The idea that this is the way in which the Government should spend taxpayers’ money is simply baffling. When nurseries across the country are facing closure because the Government will not deliver the investment needed to deliver on their manifesto pledge to provide 30 hours of free childcare a week and our schools are facing deeper cuts in their budgets than at any time since the 1970s, why is this money being taken away from them?

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an outstanding speech. Have we not seen the problem with Tory education thinking this afternoon? Government Members think that some types of schools are better than others and that some children deserve better opportunities than others. That is what is so entirely wrong with what they are arguing today.

Angela Rayner: Do you know what? That is the real rub: that is the difference between Labour Members and Government Members. We believe that teachers are invaluable in making sure that our schools are the best they can possibly be, rather than focusing on the vehicle in which those teachers and drivers take forward that mission.

We know that Members across this House agree that this is not the way we should spend school budgets. Members in the devolved nations will want to know the implications for their own school budgets, too. I know that many Government Members share the view of Labour Members that education is the key to social mobility, and that for all our differences on policy, they would not want the Government to waste the Department for Education’s budget on an ineffective vanity project. That must be the key test of every spending commitment made by the Secretary of State.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Will the hon. Lady provide some clarification? We have heard loud and clear her position on grammar schools, but is it also her position that the Government should close all the grammar schools that already exist?

Angela Rayner: Again, I reiterate my point that Members on both sides of the House have the absolute responsibility to make sure that the policies they introduce in this House for the education of all our children are in their best interests and are evidence-based. This must be the key test of every spending commitment made by the Secretary of State: will this money be spent on something that we know will improve the lives of children across this country, whatever their background? That is the point of our motion, and I urge all Members on both sides of the House to ensure that our collective endeavour is always for the best education for every child.

1.6 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from ‘potential;’ to end and add

‘shares the strong commitment of this Government to promoting and improving social mobility and building a country that works for everyone; notes that there are now more than 1.4 million pupils in England attending good or outstanding schools than in 2010; and welcomes the opportunity afforded by the Schools that Work for Everyone consultation to seek the widest possible range of views on how the Government can build upon these successes and awaits the outcome of the current consultation.’

Social mobility is something that matters hugely to this Government and, of course, to Members across this House. It is easy for us to say that where someone starts should not dictate where they finish, but the greatest challenge we all face is that, in reality, that still makes a difference, as it has done for generations. As last week’s Social Mobility Commission’s report tells us, just 5% of children on free school meals gain five good GCSEs; they are 29% less likely to take two or more of the facilitating A-levels that will help to keep their options open; and they are 34% more likely to drop out of post-16 education altogether. It is therefore no surprise that they are 19% less likely to go to university, and 47% less likely to attend a top Russell Group institution.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Given the excellent case the Secretary of State is laying out, how can those statistics be changed by grammar schools when currently only 3% of kids on free school meals go to grammar schools?

Justine Greening: I will come on to that point, but as we already have grammar schools, it is quite right for us as a Government to set out the case for how we make sure that they play their full role in driving social mobility.

I have set out a number of facts about the prospects of too many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in our country. None of these facts should be acceptable to us. They certainly are not acceptable to me or this Government. I believe that social mobility matters for several key reasons. First, it matters for individuals. I believe that the innate desire of people to do well is one of the most powerful forces for change in our country, and social mobility is about our country working with the grain of human nature. Secondly, social mobility matters for communities. Fundamentally, feeling that we all have an equal shot at success—having equal opportunity—is the glue that binds us together. Lastly, social mobility matters for our economy. Investing in people is a core part of how we raise productivity. Yes, we need to build roads and railways, but we are determined to build up people, too.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): How can the Government claim to be the party of social mobility when 800 children’s centres have closed and 29 nursery schools have closed in the past year alone? That is letting down a whole generation of two, three and four-year-old kids, because if they fall behind at that age, they will never catch up.

Justine Greening: Of course early years education matters. We are investing in not only improved but more childcare for parents around the country—for working

parents, in particular—because we think that having a strong start is absolutely vital. As I was saying, this is about improving not just the prospects of individuals and communities, but the prospects of our country and its economy, and we have to build our country's economy by building our people.

Lyn Brown: Will the right hon. Lady explain how having additional secondary modern schools will do anything that she aspires to do?

Justine Greening: Of course, this is not about additional secondary modern schools or a return to a binary system. The reforms over the last six years have given children and parents a more diverse offer and set of choices in education than ever before. It is now time to see how grammar schools can play a stronger role in our education system in the 21st century.

Lucy Powell: The Secretary of State is citing much of the evidence from last week's Social Mobility Commission report about the challenge our country faces. Why will she not adopt in full the recommendations of that report on how to tackle those inequalities, rather than cherry-picking the little bits that she wants to bring to the House?

Justine Greening: The report, quite rightly, set out that we need a much longer-term programme of social reform. Alan Milburn talked about a 10-year programme. It also pointed to our focus on improving attainment in schools. The bottom line is that we will not make significant progress on social mobility until we focus on the areas of common ground, rather than the Opposition spending their entire time focusing on areas where they do not agree.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Justine Greening: Let me make some progress.

I was setting out why the Government believe that driving social mobility matters so much. In reality, as challenging as it is for our country, no country in the world has managed to crack the issue of social mobility. That is because it is highly complex, many factors feed into it and improving social mobility is, as the Social Mobility Commission says, a long-term issue that needs a long-term approach, not to be treated like a political football for short-term political gain. If we are to make a difference, we must see social mobility as a generational challenge that we must tackle together on behalf of the next generation.

The difference may be that for us, fundamentally, social mobility is an agenda of levelling up opportunity for those who do not have it—something that, I hope, we can all agree is the right thing to do. Education is, of course, at the heart of how we do that.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): On that point, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the support that is provided by the pupil premium. That £2.5 billion really has helped to narrow the gap in attainment.

Justine Greening: I am grateful for that intervention. Not only is that spending protected for the course of this Parliament, but we are working through the education

endowment fund to ensure that we understand how that investment can have the biggest impact for disadvantaged children. I went to see a grammar school last week that has a high proportion of children who are eligible for free school meals and the pupil premium. We looked at what it is doing to improve the attainment of those young people.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): To help build a consensus around our education policy, perhaps the Secretary of State could give us one piece of evidence that suggests that grammar schools would improve educational outcomes and social mobility for the most disadvantaged.

Justine Greening: We know that the education gap between children on free school meals who go to grammars and their better-off counterparts is closed during the course of their education. We know that disadvantaged children who go to grammars have a better chance of getting into university, including Russell Group universities, and that is because their attainment improves.

Education is at the heart of how we drive social mobility in our country, which is why the Government have had a programme of such radical reform over the past six years. The academies and free schools programme, which I noticed the shadow Secretary of State was not willing to support, has given schools the freedom to run themselves in the best interests of their children and local communities. The introduction of the EBacc has given more children access to a core curriculum to make sure that they keep their options open, not closed, as they make decisions about their future. Thanks to the hard work of teachers all over the country, 1.4 million more children are being taught in schools that are good or outstanding than in 2010. That means that 1.4 million more children are getting access to an education that will allow them to make the most of their talents.

Of course, this starts with early-years education. Children must arrive at school ready and able to learn if they are to take full advantage of the education on offer, which is why we are introducing 30 hours of free childcare for the working parents of three and four-year-olds. It is also why we are looking at how we can improve the quality of the early-years workforce even further. Teachers are crucial in improving attainment outcomes for our young people, which is why we are reforming initial teacher training.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): What does my right hon. Friend think about the independent study by ResPublica, commissioned by Knowsley Council, which concluded that in the second most deprived borough in the country, a grammar school would provide a much-needed incentive and raise the standards of education?

Justine Greening: I have seen that report. It shows that when people look at the evidence and are prepared to step away from political ideology, they see the reality that grammars can have a transformational impact in some of the most deprived communities in which we want to see the biggest changes.

Andy Burnham: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Justine Greening: No, I will make some progress because I have given way to a lot of Members.

[Justine Greening]

As I was saying, we want to improve teacher training. We have therefore started the teaching and leadership innovation fund so that the most challenged schools can build more capacity to have excellent teachers and leaders.

It is vital that the standards and quality of our technical education in this country mirror the excellence that we have been embedding in the academic routes. We have focused on academic routes, so it is time for us to focus similarly on improving technical education for young people. We will work hard to put technical and further education on a level footing with the academic route that other young people already take. Through the Technical and Further Education Bill, we are slimming down the system of qualifications and putting employers in the driving seat regarding how they are designed and delivered so that there are a smaller number of routes that are much easier to understand and lead directly to career pathways for young people.

We have also focused on apprenticeships so that young people get direct work experience as they learn. We plan to create 3 million new apprenticeships by 2020 and, for the first time, British business is investing through the apprenticeship levy to make sure that those apprenticeships are of a high quality. Yesterday, we had the Third Reading of the Higher Education and Research Bill, which will put in place a new teaching framework to drive up teaching quality, to make university outcomes more transparent than ever and, through the planned Office for Students, to promote equality of opportunity throughout our universities.

We have to recognise that one of the biggest challenges faced by the education system is the growing need for more good school places. Despite the progress that we have made, too many children still do not have a place at a good school. There are 1.2 million children in schools that Ofsted says are not good enough. That was why we published the “Schools that work for everyone” consultation, which asks important open questions about how we can use the educational expertise that exists in our country’s independent schools, faith schools, universities and selective schools. We cannot afford to leave a single stone unturned as we drive up opportunity.

Andy Burnham: The Secretary of State rightly spoke about building a consensus across the House on education policy, but I put it to her that that will be more likely to happen if the Government stick to their mandate on education. Will she read out the precise section of the Conservative party manifesto from the last election that gives her a mandate to lift the bar on the creation of new grammar schools?

Justine Greening: We talked about excellent school places and expanding the very best schools in our country, including grammar schools. I just do not think it is viable for the Labour party to say that it does not like the grammars that we have, but to be equivocal about whether it is still its policy to shut those grammars. I will give way to the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) if she wants to confirm the position. There is a gaping hole in the official Opposition’s policy on grammars. I do not think that it is tenable in a country that has grammars and selection for the Opposition

to say they do not like that situation, but that they do not want us to take any steps whatever to see how we can deliver more strongly on social mobility through the schools already in place.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): My right hon. Friend will surely be aware that we have had 18 years of Labour policies in Wales and, as a result, have lower education standards according to PISA, the OECD and Labour’s former education Minister in Wales. Does my right hon. Friend think we should take any notice whatever of what Labour has to say about education?

Justine Greening: No, I do not. The legacy of 13 years of Labour was disastrous for our youngest people, not just because of grade inflation, which gave millions of young people the sense that they had achieved grades although they were not at the level they needed to be, but—dare I say it—because under the previous Labour Government, youth unemployment went up by nearly 50%. If opportunity is about anything, it surely starts with the dignity of being able to have a job and a career.

Last week I was at Handsworth Grammar School, where around 25% of pupils are eligible for the deprivation element of the pupil premium. Those young people talked to me about how much they value the education they are getting. One student, who is planning to go to Oxford—[*Interruption.*] I am not sure precisely what that young man would say about the chattering from Opposition Members, but I think he would be extremely dismayed to hear the school that is giving him a transformational opportunity being talked down. His family had arrived in this country just two generations before. His grandparents arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Within two generations of that, he is hoping to be able to go to Oxford. He talked to me about what the chance to go to a grammar school has meant for him, his family and his future prospects. It is levelling up, and that is what we want to do.

I hope that we all agree that the social mobility agenda is about more young people having opportunities and aiming higher, like that gentleman, not fewer. Asking in our consultation how we can make grammars more open to disadvantaged children is exactly what we should be doing.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): My right hon. Friend is speaking powerfully about the opportunities that grammar schools provide to children from very ordinary backgrounds. Does she agree that it is a real tragedy that we have not invested more in grammar schools? The existing ones in my constituency are under massive pressure from the children of parents living around my constituency, which restricts the number of places available for children in Rugby.

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is right. It is simply untenable to say to parents who want more choice, and to children who otherwise would have a place in such schools, that they cannot have it. That is simply wrong. We should at least allow local communities to decide. It is not tenable to take the approach of simply saying to parents, “No, you can’t have them; we know better,” or of saying to a child, “You got the grades to be able to go, but you are not allowed to because we have decided.”

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Justine Greening: Let me make some more progress, as lots of Members on both sides of the House want to contribute to this important debate.

In the consultation we are asking how we can make grammars more open to disadvantaged children and ensure that the excellence that exists in grammar schools can play a stronger role in school improvement throughout the system, as that is also part of what we should be doing. We are also asking how, as has been seen elsewhere, grammars can play a role in lifting the schools around them and doing a stronger job. Many already work extremely hard to do that, and we want it to become the norm.

As we have just heard, selective and grammar schools are often hugely over-subscribed, so consulting on how we respond to that demand from parents and pupils is exactly what we should be doing. We cannot simply say that those parents and students are wrong. It is time to look at how we can use grammar schools to open up more opportunities to more people.

Grammars close the attainment gap between pupils from deprived backgrounds and their more advantaged peers. For the top-performing 25% of primary pupils, the gap in results for pupils on free school meals in grammar schools is significantly smaller than that in non-selective schools. Children in grammars on free school meals are twice as likely to get five good GCSE grades, and so twice as likely to secure a place at and to attend one of the top Russell Group universities, as their wealthier peers who attend comprehensives.

We will not fix the challenges of social mobility and opportunity by complaining; we have to take practical action. That is why at the very least we need to give local communities the choice. That is exactly what our consultation proposes and asks about. We have improved and are improving our school system and standards. Those communities that want to keep the status quo of their existing good and outstanding schools will be able to do so. There is much more to do, alongside the consultation, to ensure that every child has the education that they need and deserve.

We must recognise that some challenges that we face inside schools also require solutions outside schools. That is why I have announced the first six opportunity areas for parts of the country where social mobility is really stalling, but young people have huge potential that we want to unlock. We need to make sure that that happens.

Tom Pursglove: As a comprehensive-educated lad from Wellingborough, it is music to my ears to hear that the Government are committed not just to the academic but to the technical side of things, as that is so important. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is also important to recognise in our education policy that different things work in different areas?

Justine Greening: That is quite right. The first six opportunity areas we picked are very different places—some coastal, some more rural and some more urban. That is because we recognise that those communities each face different challenges—sometimes slightly different; sometimes significantly so—in raising attainment. We know that we need to work not only inside schools with teachers and the headteachers leading those schools, but outside schools. We will have better careers advice and

mentoring. We will work with the CBI, for example, and the Federation of Small Businesses on opportunities for work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships.

Wes Streeting: I am delighted that the Secretary of State has given way on that specific point because under the previous Labour Government the London Challenge achieved something very similar by doing exactly what she has described, alongside initiatives such as the education maintenance allowance, grants for the poorest students, a huge transformation of funding for teaching and school buildings, and freedoms for schools and teachers. Is she sure she has nothing to learn from that Government?

Justine Greening: I certainly do not think so in relation to the outcomes achieved for young people who left the education system having all too often taken exams that suffered from grade inflation and—critically, as we see from the report by Alison Wolf—having taken qualifications that employers simply did not value, but that those people had often been told to do because that was an easier route for the institution that they were in. There is lots to learn from that Labour Government, but clearly it is what not to do, rather than what to do.

Seema Malhotra *rose—*

Justine Greening: I will try to make some progress and finally conclude.

Opportunity areas are not simply about addressing the need for more good school places in all parts of the country. We want them to be in the vanguard of helping us to ensure that we learn how best to drive social mobility in very different places, to spread what works throughout England. Under this Government, further and higher education, schools and apprenticeships have been put back into one Department—the Department for Education. That means that we have never had a better chance to make sure that education, and opportunity as a whole, work to drive social mobility throughout our country.

Improving social mobility is our country's greatest generational challenge. Its complexity means that change will not happen overnight—as I have said, no country has cracked how to drive great social mobility—but making the best possible success of Brexit, as this Government and this party are committed to doing, is why social mobility matters, and why education is at the heart of that agenda. In the end, it will be people who lift this great country of ours, which is why we have to make ours a country that works for everyone. The Prime Minister set out her intention and the intention of the Government. Now it is time for the House to do the same so that we can get on with ensuring that the education system becomes the driver of social mobility that it really can be. Young people get only one shot at their education, so we urgently need to get this right. That requires all of us to be prepared to work together so that, if at all possible, we can build a cross-party consensus on how we get it right.

1.30 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I begin by declaring an interest: I was a physics teacher and spent 20 years working in the comprehensive sector.

[Carol Monaghan]

My father sat, and failed, the 11-plus exam. He ended up in the local secondary, St Roch's, in an inner-city area of Glasgow. Pupils at St Roch's were not expected to achieve. School was simply a holding area until they were old enough to enter the workforce. My dad set out on the path that was laid in front of him. Most of his classmates went on to work in the shipyards, but he went on to work in the Glasgow parks department, where he remained for over 40 years. He has some good memories, but work was simply something he did to provide for his family. There was no element of choice: you were grateful you had the job, and he was grateful.

By the time my siblings and I went to school, grammars had been completely abolished in Scotland. We also attended the local secondary, but now it was comprehensive and there were no preconceived ideas or restrictions placed upon us. My father watched with pride as one by one his five children went on to university—possible, of course, because we paid no fees and were awarded maintenance grants.

By coincidence, early in my career I taught in my father's old school. It was, however, transformed. By now, St Roch's was a comprehensive and a much happier place. The walls were a celebration of past pupils' achievements—some academic, some business and some vocational—but the real difference was the expectation of achievement. Every young person entering the school was seen as a human being with potential and every young person felt the weight of that expectation. The real problem with selective education is not that we end up with good schools and poorer schools, and not that one set of teachers works harder than another; it is that whole swathes of our young people will be labelled—wrongly, of course—as having failed. With that, social mobility falls.

It might be argued that for those who have the intellectual maturity, or whose parents can pay for the tuition to pass the 11-plus exams, grammar schools offer a more sheltered experience, but the Government should be concerned with every single child. With grammar schools on the horizon, that is simply not the case.

Andy Burnham: Does the hon. Lady agree that the major flaw in the Secretary of State's speech was that she could not bring herself to acknowledge that if she pursues this policy it will lead to the creation of more secondary modern schools? That is the truth that Government Members will not face up to.

Carol Monaghan: Absolutely. I actually think there was another flaw in the Secretary of State's speech. Listening to her speaking in such glowing terms about grammar schools, I wondered why we do not just make every school a grammar. That would solve the problem.

Many secondary schools choose to set their pupils according to academic ability. However, the educational evidence for the benefits of setting is scant. Certainly when pupils are working on the same curricular content, the evidence is clear: mixed ability classes are far more successful in raising attainment. The most able pupils succeed in whatever class they are in. The least able pupils do a bit better in mixed ability. The massive advantage, however, is for the swathes of average attainers who, within a mixed ability class, have no ceiling placed

on their ambitions. In fact, when the Government use one of their buzzwords, "aspiration", it is indeed this large group of middle pupils who embody and can embrace that idea. Conversely, when decisions based on ability have been imposed on pupils, it sends out strong signals about what that particular group is expected to achieve. In other words, it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rolling this out on a much larger scale, as is being considered with the return to grammar schools, means that we have young people who have had decisions made on their future attainment before they even have a chance to attain.

The damage that does cannot be underestimated. To be told at age 11 that you are not good enough is an incredibly difficult thing to overcome. Despite the best efforts of teachers, that labelling is a blow to confidence and self-esteem that can remain throughout a person's life.

Chris Philp: Given what the hon. Lady has just said, will she join me in welcoming the Green Paper's proposal to allow for transfers into and out of selective schools at ages 14 and 16, as well as 11?

Carol Monaghan: I would welcome very little of the Green Paper. I do not agree with selective schooling.

Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): Does the hon. Lady think that eligibility to stay on at either a college or a sixth form based on the level of qualifications at GCSE should therefore also be abolished?

Carol Monaghan: I am not sure I understand the hon. Gentleman's question. Students should be able to stay on in school as long as the school fits their requirements, and as long as the school is able to offer them something. That might not be what he asked, but I will move on.

I have received correspondence not from my constituents but from people living in England. They have shared their concerns about grammar schools. I will read out a section of a letter I received from a gentleman in England:

"As an 11+ failure...The sense of failure is still with me...so much so I find it hard in this letter to admit I went to a Secondary Modern School. Nearly all of my fellow pupils...came from poorer or deprived backgrounds—I cannot think of one who came from a well-off background. As children, we accepted our lot and it was made clear to us that our choices of work were limited after school...There was a small cohort of teachers who did their best for us despite (as I realise now) limited resources. However, the turnover of teachers was high, which did not bode well for continuity of education. There was no question of taking any exams for qualifications of any kind. University was unthinkable. Higher education...was closed off to us; we were in the rubbish bin."

It is well known that young people's thinking skills develop at different rates. Some at aged 11 will have advanced cognitive abilities. For others, it takes several more years for their thinking skills to mature. A number of years ago, I taught a young boy who had come from the primary school at age 11 with extremely poor literacy and numeracy skills. As time went on, however, he showed some talent for science. Despite all the original expectations placed upon him—not by teachers, but probably by the young boy himself—he managed to scrape by in his national exams and went on to university. He went on to achieve a degree in chemistry and then a

PhD. He now travels the world as a chemical engineer. That is social mobility and it was achieved in a comprehensive school. That boy would not have come close to passing an 11-plus exam. I completely oppose selective education, which, thankfully, will not be introduced in Scotland.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Is there not a tendency in this debate to send out a message that anybody who has gone to a secondary modern is failing? I went to a secondary modern school, as did the hon. Lady's father, so I know how tough it can be, but we can succeed. Moreover, it is not a question of success or failure; it is about making the alternative schools as good as the grammar schools.

Carol Monaghan: I am extremely glad that the hon. Gentleman succeeded and made his way, but not every young person has the strength of character that he is displaying, so for many young people it causes major issues.

Huw Merriman: I made no point about whether I had succeeded or otherwise—many could argue, given I am here, that I have not succeeded—but we are in danger of going back to the past and seeing this as a question of either success or failure, when in fact it is possible to have a mix of schools and still see those who do not go to grammar schools thriving in successful schools. We should not talk that down in this House.

Carol Monaghan: We have swathes of teachers battling the labelling of these young people and working flat out to overcome the prejudices against them. It is not right that the Government should make life more difficult for them by continuing and, in fact, extending selective education.

I have a letter from a young person from High Wycombe. He writes:

"I currently attend a grammar school in High Wycombe... At the age of 10 I was put under a ridiculous amount of stress and felt at a disadvantage going into the 11+ as my family could only afford a fortnight of private tuition... The system makes 70% of kids feel second best".

The social mobility agenda in Scotland is quite different. We are considering what positive steps we can take to increase social mobility, including the provision of 30 hours of early learning for all children, regardless of their parents' work status. We also have the attainment fund, which I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) will mention in his speech, and which has been used to target the attainment gap that exists in some areas.

John Redwood: Will the hon. Lady apologise to the excellent pupils and teachers in the comprehensives in my area who achieve great things alongside grammars, which can also recruit from my local area? She should not run those people down; they are doing a great job.

Carol Monaghan: As someone who attended and has taught in a comprehensive school, I think that these teachers and young people are doing some of the best jobs in the country—possibly far better than some in other situations.

There are some things that the Scottish Government have not done. They have not cut the education maintenance allowance, which allows young people from disadvantaged background to remain at school and achieve to their full potential, and maintenance grants are still available for our young people going to university. I want to give an example of something else that has succeeded in increasing social mobility. In Glasgow, there are areas of serious deprivation, and schools in these areas might have only one or two pupils planning on sitting the highest level of qualifications in Scotland—the advanced higher. It is unreasonable, or uneconomic, to run the course for one or two pupils, so these pupils—a group of 20 or 30 students—now come to Caledonian University, funded by the Scottish Government, the university and Glasgow City Council, to experience life on a university camps and to achieve their advanced higher qualifications. That is social mobility.

We support the Opposition motion. Social mobility definitely has to be increased, but grammar schools and austerity are not the way to do it. We have to start looking at what positive steps we can take.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. On account of the level of demand, there is a requirement for the imposition of a time limit. We will begin with a six-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

1.44 pm

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): All Members can agree that a first-class education is the greatest investment we as a country can make in our next generation. I have no doubt about the Secretary of State's commitment to increasing social mobility, having heard her speak around the Cabinet table over the past few years. I think we can also all agree that post-Brexit it is more important than ever that all our young people leave education well skilled and well educated, particularly if we are to have a new immigration policy in the next few years.

We want excellent education everywhere. As I said at our party conference a couple of years ago, that "everywhere" is fundamental. What is missing from the Green Paper is that sense of a strong and consistent whole system. That might be because it only talks about schools, rather than some of the other issues facing our education system, such as the quality of teaching and the need for more great teachers and for announcements on fairer funding. That said, I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State talking about her commitment to the EBacc.

I should also recognise the Secretary of State's announcements on opportunity areas. In the White Paper published earlier this year, we identified areas—the achieving excellence areas—that really needed attention, and last week the Social Mobility Commission picked that up. We have heard already about the ResPublica report on Knowsley commissioned by the Knowsley education commission, to which we should pay tribute for recognising the entrenched educational under-performance in its own area and the need to ensure that children and families have choice when it comes to schools.

[Nicky Morgan]

For me, there are two tests for new schools policies. First, do they specifically tackle areas of underperformance? Secondly—this is at the heart of the debate on selection—is every child being offered an academic, knowledge-rich curriculum? I know that that knowledge-rich curriculum is also of fundamental importance to the Minister for School Standards.

We have to acknowledge that the Government's Green Paper sets out the dangers of change in selective schools. Paragraph 4 on page 21 states:

“while those children that attend selective schools enjoy a far greater chance of academic success, there is some evidence that children who attend non-selective schools in selective areas may not fare as well academically – both compared to local selective schools and comprehensives in non-selective areas.”

The Education Policy Institute published a report in September. It wrote:

“Analysis of educational performance across OECD countries has concluded that a higher proportion of academically selective schools is not associated with better performance of a school system overall, according to results in the international PISA tests taken by pupils at age 15 in 2012.”

I would like to hear more from the Minister about the evidence the Government are relying on in making the proposals in the Green Paper.

We talk about being a one nation Government, so our focus has to be on tackling those areas of the country where school underperformance is still entrenched, where families do not have a choice, where there are no good or outstanding schools and where the opportunity to travel outside the borough boundaries just does not exist. If the Government seriously believe that having more selective schools will raise standards across the board, they would have proposed introducing those schools only in pilot areas where there was underperformance, but the Green Paper talks about local demand being a driver. What if those areas most in need of higher standards opt out of having new schools? Given the inherent problems in the proposals, the Green Paper has to talk about mitigating measures.

My other concern is that the proposals will distract the Department and the Government from the issues really facing our education system. Let me again mention fair funding, which I know colleagues of all parties, and particularly on the Conservative side, take incredibly seriously as an issue that has to be sorted out.

The second test is whether we think all children can benefit from an excellent, academic, knowledge-rich curriculum, which I think is what our future workforce of the 21st century needs. True social mobility requires that every child be given the same opportunity.

Andy Burnham: I am listening carefully to what the right hon. Lady is saying. Does she agree with me that this policy is a distraction, and that if we wanted to make the biggest difference to education in our country, we would do that by focusing on the 0 to 4 age group and ensuring that more children arrive in reception classes ready to learn, with the language and social skills that they need?

Nicky Morgan: The right hon. Gentleman is right in the sense that early education is, of course, critically important. One of the issues surrounding more selection

is that the attainment gap is already wide by the time children get to the age of 11, and often even before they have reached primary school. The right hon. Gentleman has been a Secretary of State, and he knows that Departments can do more than one thing, so we can focus on early years at the same time as focusing on making sure that every child has an excellent academic education.

As I was saying, true social mobility requires every child to be given the same opportunity, and it is not for other people to make judgments about what children are entitled to. I will always remember my visit to a primary school in Lancashire, whose headteacher informed me that the children in her previous school, a city centre school, were only ever going to be assessed as “requires improvement”. If children are being written off by some even before they have reached the age of 11, that tells me that there is a problem and that it needs to be tackled first.

I will be honest: when it comes to knowing how to vote, I have struggled with both the motion and the amendment before us today. What is being proposed in the Green Paper was not in our manifesto. I really hope that Ministers will listen to the responses to the consultation and to what Members of all parties say today. Let me suggest that if the Government are determined to take forward these proposals, they must set out how the proposals will lift standards in the underperforming areas, and they must start with those underperforming areas.

1.52 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan). She and I have disagreed many times in the past, but I agree with much of what she has just outlined, and I hope that her successor is listening carefully to what she had to say. We do not have long so I shall try to canter through some of the issues as best I can.

Before we get into the meat of the debate, it is important to clarify what we all mean by social mobility. Too often in this debate, we talk about plucking the lucky few from the most disadvantaged to the very top, but that is not what the policy on social mobility needs to address. It is about economic and social progress for the many, not just for the lucky few. It is about making the distance between the rungs on the ladder shorter and pulling up the bottom rung altogether.

The challenges that we face to achieve that are, as many have said, deep seated and manifold, but they are particularly important in the world of work of today and tomorrow. Automation and digitalisation and the hollowing out of the low-skilled and many skilled jobs will mean that, for example, by 2022 there will be 9 million low-skilled people going after 4 million jobs, with a 3 million shortfall to fill the 15 million high-skilled jobs that will be available in that economy of the future. Those are the big challenges that our country faces today. The educational landscape needs to address those challenges, not hark back to the challenges of the '50s and '60s and the very different economy that obtained then by comparison with today. We thus need a coherent, whole and big bold strategy for tackling social mobility and narrowing the gap in educational disadvantage. As successive Governments have sought to do that, they

have found that it is about dealing with the long tail of under-achievement—not, as this Government seem hell-bent on doing, creating an even more elite education for the already elite.

I see the Secretary of State shaking her head, so let me tell her that the Government could start by adopting in full the recommendations of her own Social Mobility Commission report, published just last week. If she did, she would get widespread cross-party support. There are three key areas set out in that report. I fully agree with them, and they have already been mentioned.

The first is about quality in the early years. I am afraid that when it comes to the early years, we are yet again seeing the Government not understand the policy question that they are being asked. Yes, they are putting more money into childcare—something that I very much welcome—but there are two reasons for investing in the early years: the first is to enable parents to get back into the labour market, and the second is to narrow the educational attainment gap that already exists for many by the age of five. To narrow that gap, we must have an absolute focus on quality, which must be available for the most disadvantaged children, not just for a few. The Government could be spending their money much more wisely in this area by driving up quality across the board.

We need a clear agenda as we go forwards, but I am afraid that many things have been going backwards under this Government. We need more support for parents through the Sure Start programme. We need quality provision most of all in the most disadvantaged areas, as we see with our maintained nursery schools and many classes in primary school, which are all under threat as a result of the new funding formula. We are seeing a levelling down, not a levelling up when it comes to quality in the early years. We could use the early years pupil premium much better. I say to the Secretary of State that she should leverage the extra money she is putting in to ensure that quality is at the heart of her strategy. All we hear about are working families and childcare, but that is not what the social mobility debate is about.

We need a pool of talented teachers everywhere, as we saw in the London Challenge, which was a fantastic achievement of the last Government. We need to see it rolled out to places such as Knowsley and the 10 most disadvantaged areas across the country—but that is not what is happening. Grammar schools will exacerbate the problems of getting quality teachers in the areas that need them most.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the hon. Lady not notice the irony in mentioning Knowsley, where the Labour council's own report said that the introduction of grammar schools would be transformative, especially for the working-class boys who were under-achieving?

Lucy Powell: That was not a recommendation that the council took on board. What we need is to get the quality teachers into the right areas. We know what works—we know it worked in London—and we need to see the London Challenge rolled out to the 10 worst areas where we know that most disadvantaged children are not getting the schooling they need. There is much more we can do in the post-16 area as well, as the Social Mobility Commission also said.

Let me deal finally with grammar schools. Let us quickly remind ourselves of the evidence. The OECD found that selective countries do less well than those that are non-selective. In England, the highest attainment gaps are in selective boroughs, yet the highest performing local authorities are comprehensive. In Kent, 27% of free school meal children get five A to C grades, whereas in London it is 45%. The tiny number of free school meal children who attend grammar schools is not comparable with the tens of thousands of free school meal children elsewhere. There are just 3,000 of them.

David Willetts described grammar schools as “an arms race of private tuition for rich parents”.

The inequalities that we have described get greater and greater in this system. That is why the chief inspector of schools, the Fair Education Alliance, the Social Mobility Commission, the Education Policy Institute, the Sutton Trust, the headteachers' unions, all the heads in Surrey, Ruth Davidson and many Conservative Members are all opposed to the reintroduction of grammar schools. If the Secretary of State wants proper cross-party agreement on driving up social mobility, she should take forward her own Government's report every step of the way and agree with its recommendations on grammar schools. If she did, she would get a consensus in this House.

1.59 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): There is a happy consensus well hidden in this debate. All parties in the House believe that education is of huge importance, and we all want the best possible education for every child in our country. We also accept that the state has the main obligation, because most children will need state finance and state support to secure that great education.

I pay tribute to Ministers for the fact that 1.4 million children are now being educated in good and outstanding schools. There is proof that work by successive Ministers, and, more important, by an army of heads and other teachers in state schools, is delivering better education throughout the country. However, there is still much more to do, and I hope that all the Labour Members who are so critical of current educational achievement in their own areas will work positively with their schools and local education authorities to try to achieve that better performance.

I was pleased to hear the shadow Secretary of State say that she wanted to look at the evidence, but she rather spoilt that by revealing that, although she has made grammar schools her “big thing” and tabled this motion, she has not actually visited any grammar schools since taking on the job. I think that it would have been a courtesy to the grammar schools that she is attacking to visit one or two of them before mounting her challenge today.

The Opposition's argument is that selection is wrong because we may not select all the talented people at the age of choice, and that it is therefore unfair to give the advantage to those who are selected. Again, however, there is huge humbug on the Opposition Benches. When I asked the shadow Secretary of State whether she was upset by the fact that our elite sportspeople are usually selected at quite a young age for special training and special education, and that they are expected to achieve to a much higher level than the average and are given training and made to do extra work in order to do so, she did not seem to be at all upset.

Andy Burnham: That is a completely useless analogy. Education is about life. It is about the skills that people need to get through life—the basic literacy and numeracy. Sport is not about the entirety of life. That is why education is different, and that is why it is wrong for any child to be labelled second class at the age of 11.

John Redwood: The right hon. Gentleman simply does not understand. If a young person from a poor background becomes a top footballer, that is a transformational event in their life, and good luck to them. Why do the Opposition not understand that exactly the same arguments apply to art, ballet and music? We take the children who we think are going to be the most talented musicians, at quite a young age, and we give them elite special training so that they can play to the highest standards in the world.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned football. The fact is that 13% of our national football team went to private schools, which is twice the national percentage of children who go to private schools. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that that might account for the performance of our national football team, and that we might be missing out on the talent that exists in the comprehensive sector? Does he not recognise that that is precisely the problem that we are discussing today? We are missing out on talent as a result of too narrow a focus.

John Redwood: I do not think that we will get a better team by training them less, and no longer giving them any kind of elite education. I think that Opposition Members are being very obtuse.

Let me try a different argument. The Opposition's second argument against grammar schools is that in Buckinghamshire and Berkshire, where we have some good grammar schools, all the other schools must be suffering. Opposition Members write off and write down the many excellent comprehensive schools in areas that have access to grammar school places, in a quite unrealistic and unpleasant way.

I know my own area better than Buckinghamshire. We do not have any grammar schools in my constituency, but there are two excellent grammar schools just over the border in Reading, a girls' school and a boys' school, which take some of our brightest and academically most gifted pupils from the Wokingham area. Our comprehensive schools in Wokingham also contain great, academically gifted children. Those children, at the top of those schools, do not have to compete with the children at the grammar, and they go on to compete very successfully and get good places at elite universities. Opposition Members should not write off those schools, or pretend that they are some kind of failed secondary modern.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) reminded us that there are some very good secondary modern schools whose pupils achieve great things. My hon. Friend himself achieved great things before coming to the House, and some will consider it a great achievement that he is in the House now. I think that that shows that no one should write off any whole category of school. As an Opposition Member pointed out in a more

honest moment, what really matters in a school is the talent of the teaching force and the good will and working spirit of the pupils. The two play off each other. That can be found in a good comprehensive, and it can be found in a good grammar school.

The Opposition must understand that we are not trying to create a series of schools for failures. We want to have great schools for everyone. We believe that selecting some pupils on the basis of academic ability and giving them elite academic training can make sense for them, but it does not write off the other schools.

Ian Austin: I am not at all opposed to giving the brightest pupils an elite education. That is not why I am worried about grammar schools. I am worried about grammar schools because they do not solve the central problems that our education system faces. Michael Wilshaw has said that we have "a mediocre education system". When it comes to the vast majority of pupils, we are falling behind our international competitors. In a modern economy in which the innovation sector is creating jobs at 30 times the rate of the rest of the economy, we need to exploit the talents of all our young people. That is why I am worried about grammar schools.

John Redwood: I opened my speech with exactly that comment. I think that that is common ground. However, selecting some people who are good at football or good at academic subjects does not prevent us from providing a good education for everyone else. If we want to have more Nobel prize winners in the future, we should bear in mind that they are likely to be attending the great universities in our country. Do we not want to feed those great universities with the best possible talent from our schooling system, and should not those talented people have been given an education that stretches them and takes them further along the road to great work before they reach the universities? The most successful people at university have often had an extremely good education beforehand. They are self-starters, and understand the importance of that.

Lucy Powell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

John Redwood: I do not have time, and many other Members wish to speak.

We need to get the maximum number of talented pupils through at the highest possible level, so that they can achieve even greater things at the elite universities.

That brings me to my next problem with the Opposition's arguments: they completely ignore the fee-paying schools. Some fee-paying schools in our country achieve enormous success academically. They have a double privilege, because they select bright pupils who also have rich family backgrounds. When the two are put together, the combination is explosively successful.

I do not begrudge people a great education if they come from a rich background. I did not come from a rich background myself, but I am grateful for the fact that those people can have a great education, and it is even better that they pay for it themselves as well as paying their taxes. I am not jealous. It must be a great problem to be against all kinds of elite education when we have those great schools with their double advantage. However, a grammar school gives people who are bright but did not come from a rich background an opportunity

to compete better against the phenomenally successful elite schools in the public sector. As was rightly pointed out by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), some of our public schools dominate not only academically, but in the sporting world and in other worlds as well, which shows that their combination of resource and selection is very powerful. Surely we need more centres of excellence to which people can gain access without having rich parents.

I find it deeply disappointing that Opposition Front Benchers, having called a debate on this important subject, cannot confirm or deny that they wish to abolish the grammar schools that we have. I have one little tip for the Opposition. I was in opposition for all too many years, and I remember how difficult it was, but, as a shadow spokesman, I always found it helpful to work out my party's position before challenging the Government on theirs. I needed to make sure that my party's position on the topic for which I was responsible was sensible and also likely to be popular. I think that the Opposition have failed both tests today. It sounds as if the shadow Secretary of State wants to abolish the grammar schools, but does not have the courage to say so.

Let me issue a plea to the House. I ask Members to get behind the excellent grammar schools that we have, and to get behind the excellent comprehensives that we have. I ask them to understand that where comprehensives and grammars coexist, the comprehensives can do very well, and can achieve great things with their pupils. We do not have enough great schools, so let us not cripple those that we have. I certainly do not want to live in a world in which one has to be rich to go to an elite academy.

2.9 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Today's debate is about how to ensure that every child, no matter what their background is, is able to make the most of their life. As the world changes and the labour market changes, that becomes more important than ever.

Good education is the best possible route to opportunity. It is the liberator from circumstance, the opener of minds, the means by which children can change the course of their lives. Its value and power is not only for individuals; it is for the country as a whole. A well-educated country is a country better equipped to succeed in the modern world. It is not just about 11 players; it is about tens of millions of people. A country that neglects education does itself harm. It not only cuts off opportunity for individuals and leaves talent undiscovered and un nourished; it also disarms itself in the mission to make our country the best it can possibly be—so the stakes could not be higher.

There has been some progress. Last week's Social Mobility Commission report pointed out that disadvantaged young people are 30% more likely to go to university now than many years ago, but despite this progress we still have a long way to go before we can say we have succeeded in our mission. Too many children still do not get the life chances they expect. Too many children are still held back by lack of ambition, and by the view that their background dictates that they could never make it. Too much discussion about the issue

begins with the awful defeatist phrase, "These kids." I believe these kids can achieve anything; I believe that children from any background can achieve as much as those from a better-off background given the chance and the platform. When that does not happen, we have lives unfulfilled, jobs which people cannot take up, resentment at feeling closed off from how the world is changing, and a country which is not making the most of its people.

But it need not be like that; we have the power to change it, and in some cases people are already doing so. In my constituency, Holy Trinity primary school, Bilston, ranks among the top 10% of primary schools in England for work with disadvantaged children and is rated outstanding. Its Ofsted report speaks of a school where:

"School leaders and governors are relentlessly focused on securing the very best for their pupils",

and where,

"from the moment they start in the nursery, children achieve exceptionally well, and this continues throughout the school."

And all of this is done in a school where the percentage of pupils receiving the pupil premium is twice the national average and where about half the pupils are white British and half a diverse mix of other cultures.

Holy Trinity achieves this because of the fantastic leadership of its head teacher, Carroll McNally, great stewardship from its governors and a refusal to accept anything other than excellence in everything it does. It is an island of excellence, and we have other islands of excellence too, but for all pupils to achieve an excellent education we do not just need islands of excellence; we need a system of excellence, where the kind of performance we see at Holy Trinity and other schools like it runs right through the whole school system.

Do we have that? I am afraid we do not. In July of this year west midlands MPs received a letter from the regional director of Ofsted about the condition of secondary schools in the black country. It expressed concerns about "low standards and weaknesses" in the quality of provision for secondary-aged pupils in all four black country boroughs. The letter said pupils' achievement by the age of 16 is poor in comparison with pupils elsewhere in the west midlands and nationally; secondary schools are too often failing to build on the success of pupils in primary schools; the gap between the GCSE attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their better-off peers is wide; and not enough has been done to address these failings over the years. I am pleased to say Wolverhampton has been improving fast, and is the fourth most improved authority in the country, but that is from a low base and there is still a long way to go.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), who has convened a meeting between black country MPs and the regional director for a few weeks' time, and I hope this letter is a rallying call for everyone concerned with local education and everyone in a position of leadership to ask what we can do to improve the picture and create a system of excellence, not just islands of excellence.

We cannot be satisfied with the status quo; we ought to be passionate about changing it. The easiest thing in the world in politics is to be a megaphone for anger, but real leadership is not just about amplifying disaffection; it is about giving people a chance, not a grievance.

[Mr Pat McFadden]

An extension of grammar schools will not do that, but an improvement in all-ability schools for all children has a real chance of doing so.

2.15 pm

Mr Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): I am pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden); I agreed with nearly everything he said until his last line.

I am particularly grateful for having the opportunity to speak in this debate given the inability of the shadow Secretary of State to answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove) as to whether a future Labour Government would close existing grammar schools, which is a matter of immense importance to me and my constituents, and those of the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), who is sitting next to the shadow Secretary of State on the Opposition Front Bench. I hope we will have an answer to that important question before the end of this debate.

Fundamentally this debate is about social mobility, of course, but it is also about who we believe should make choices in our society: do we believe the men in Whitehall and we in this House should be directing what is available for our constituents, or should we be listening to what they want? Wherever we have selection in our country—my constituents in the borough of Trafford are perhaps the best performing in the country—that system is immensely popular with parents. It is hard to find significant numbers of people who would like to change it because it works so well.

Sammy Wilson: Northern Ireland has nearly a quarter of the grammar schools in the whole of the United Kingdom, and its academic results are the best of all the areas in the United Kingdom. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that reinforces his argument?

Mr Brady: I am delighted the hon. Gentleman raised that, and if I have time I will return to some of the excellent results from Northern Ireland later in my remarks.

There are those in this House who think that it is all right to have a choice of school or type of school for those who can afford to pay fees for it, and there are those who think that it is all right to have a choice of school for those who can afford to buy a house in an expensive catchment area. It is instructive to look at the results of that approach. In the borough of Trafford, which has excellent state education, only 5.2% of pupils go to independent schools; for Manchester the figure is 6.7%, and for Stockport it is 10.1%. However, although we are told that in London state education has been revolutionised, in Camden 29.8% of pupils go to independent schools. We should open up opportunity to people regardless of their ability to pay, and that is exactly what we do in those areas that offer selection in the state sector.

Trafford is outstanding not just because of its seven grammar schools, but because of the outstanding quality of its high schools. The persistent myth from the 1950s and '60s that if we have grammar schools, we have sink schools is an utter nonsense and should be rejected. Knowsley and the report produced for it have been

mentioned, including by my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), the former Secretary of State. What has not been mentioned is that one of the so-called secondary modern schools in my constituency—we call them high schools—Ashton-on-Mersey, which spawned The Dean Trust, a very good, effective multi-academy trust, is so good that it has been brought into Knowsley, which was looking for excellence from outside the authority. It is to the high schools in Trafford that people turn, which gives the lie to the nonsense about low attainment in such schools.

We should also reflect on some of the damning evidence about the degree of social segregation elsewhere in the system. The record of the last Labour Government was mentioned earlier. In 2010 the Sutton Trust looked at the 100 most socially selective schools in the country, and 91 of them were comprehensives, selecting by catchment—by postcode, and therefore the ability to buy a house in the catchment area.

Nicky Morgan: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who I know is a passionate advocate of grammar schools based on the experience of his constituency. One issue that has not been raised in the debate so far is that of ethnic segregation. Will he acknowledge that white British pupils make up 70.9% of all secondary-age pupils but only 65.9% of secondary-age pupils in selective schools? One of the arguments being made is that white working-class boys would benefit from more selection. Does he agree that that is not necessarily the case?

Mr Brady: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for her intervention. Actually, those numbers are rising fast. An answer to a written parliamentary question that I tabled recently provided evidence that every single ethnic minority group, including white British, performs better in partially selective areas than in comprehensive areas and better still in wholly selective areas than in partially selective areas.

Lucy Powell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Brady: I cannot, because I have used up my time for interventions.

If we look at A-level results, we see that eight of the top 10 local authorities are selective or partially selective. In Trafford, 35.8% achieve top A-level grades. GCSE results show that the national average for those achieving five or more GCSEs including maths at grades A* to C is 52.8%. However, seven of the 10 top-achieving authorities are selective or part-selective. I am not talking about grammar schools; I am talking about whole local education authority areas. This year in Trafford, 70.8% of pupils will get five or more A* to C grade GCSEs, with 75% getting those grades in subjects including English and maths.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): What about primary schools?

Mr Brady: I will come to primary schools in a moment.

In Trafford, the participation level in higher education is 72%, and if we look at those going to the top third of higher education institutions, we see that nine of the top 10 authorities involved are selective or part-selective. When we look at students going to Russell Group

universities, we see that seven of the top 10 authorities involved are selective or part-selective. As the hon. Gentleman will know, Trafford is the only authority in the top 20 to be located in the north or the midlands. Opposition Members who represent constituencies in the north or the midlands and who want to see more opportunities for their constituents would be wise to pay close attention to that statistic. He mentioned primary schools. The culture of aspiration runs deep in Trafford, and nine of the top 250 primary schools published in the Parent Power list in *The Sunday Times* are in Trafford. The second one in the list is Park Road Primary School in my constituency, which I am obviously delighted to be able to congratulate on its achievement.

The hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) asked about Northern Ireland, whose education system has been wholly selective for a very long time. If we look at the performance of the most effective selective systems there, we see that the percentage of children eligible for free school meals who achieve five or more A* to C grades at GCSE is 70%, compared with 45.6% for England. Northern Ireland's figure is dramatically better. The figure for those in England achieving those grades in subjects including English and maths is 33%, as against 45% in Northern Ireland.

We need to look at how we can expand real choice, and expand the number of good schools of all sorts, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough said. We can no longer tolerate a situation where people are allowed a choice of good schools that can transform life chances only if they are rich enough to pay the fees or to buy a house in the catchment area of one of the top comprehensive schools.

2.23 pm

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Ind): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady). I am also pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) initiated this important debate. She made an excellent speech. I am sure that the whole House will agree that education is the most powerful engine for social mobility that there is. It broadens horizons and opens doors, and it should be accessible to all. There is nothing more inspiring or transformative than people increasing their knowledge, realising their potential and changing their life circumstances. I owe my grandmother a debt of gratitude for pushing me to do well at night school and giving me a lifelong love of reading. Education later in life gave me the opportunities that changed my life, and I want others to have those same chances.

However, the Government's Social Mobility Commission's "State of the Nation" report shows that the engine is spluttering rather than firing on all cylinders. It concludes:

"The rungs on the social mobility ladder are growing further apart."

Those words should be a call for action, yet the Government appear to offer only words. The action that we need should not be to fall back on the failed prescriptions of the past, such as trying to revive grammar schools. We need a future-facing overhaul to bridge the gap between education and employment. The traditional world of work is rapidly changing, but much of our curriculum hopelessly lags behind the pace of change.

If education is to be a powerhouse of social mobility, it needs to work in tandem with the demands of the modern economy. The Government seem to recognise that fact only in fits and starts. They launched a half-baked "year of code" initiative, which rightly drew a great deal of criticism, not least because its executive director did not even know how to code. Advisers were quitting, saying that they wanted nothing to do with it, and the Government have gone scurrying back to their comfort zone of 1950s Britain where privileged children learned Latin and grammar schools were the great hope. That is where we are now, and it is just not good enough. There is a wealth of evidence to highlight how ill prepared we are. An "Unleashing Entrepreneurs" study by OnePoll reveals that a lack of digital skills—or "digital poverty"—is causing the failure of far too many UK start-ups. But it is not just vital tech skills that we are failing to equip our children with. Failure to meet engineering skills demand is costing the United Kingdom £27 billion a year, according to Engineering UK.

The gap between the new world of work and education continues to widen. We need to start narrowing the gap between education and employers. A survey by the Gatsby Foundation found that in only 40% of schools did a young person have an encounter with an employer at least once a year from year 7 onwards. We can do better than that, and Labour—the party of work—recognises that education cannot exist in a vacuum. Unless education adapts to the changing employment landscape, we will be setting our children up to fail. With recent research by Oxford University and Deloitte suggesting that 850,000 public sector jobs could be lost to automation by 2030, it is clear that we should be preparing now for a brave new world. Let us hope that the Chancellor is able to rise to this challenge in the autumn statement and kick-start a vision of social mobility. If the Government do not act, those who are just about managing now—the JAMS—will soon become the LOTS: those who are left on the scrapheap.

If any vision of social mobility is to have a chance of putting down roots and being seen as credible, Parliament will need to start being seen as a proper, living example of social mobility. We have seen the reaction in America to the Clintons and the Bushes as the American dream of social mobility has withered away. People want their Governments to get real and to create a genuine stakeholder society where everyone has a chance to get on. In Britain, they want the British promise that hard work will be rewarded to mean something again. That is now the challenge for this Government.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but the time limit on Back-Bench speeches must now be reduced to five minutes with immediate effect.

2.29 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): It is a particular pleasure for me to speak in this debate, having attended a south London grammar school myself. I can say from personal experience that I would not be here were it not for that grammar school, so I feel an obligation to other youngsters growing up in south London who are from ordinary backgrounds such as mine to speak up when the opportunity arises.

[Chris Philp]

I echo many of things said by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady), in particular by highlighting the terrible unfairness in the system. The only way to be sure of an outstanding education is often to pay for it, either by going private, or by buying a much more expensive house in the catchment area of a good school. It is a disgrace that the only way to be certain of an academically elite education today is by paying for it.

I want to respond to a question that the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), my colleague on the Treasury Committee, posed to the Secretary of State. He asked for evidence that children from ordinary backgrounds do better in grammar schools. He asked for one piece of evidence, but I will give him two. First, in areas where at least 10% of pupils are selected, the GCSE grades of free school meal kids are seven notches better than those of equivalent children in non-selective schools. That is a seven-grade boost. Secondly, white male children—I think the previous Secretary of State mentioned them—who go to grammar schools have a 30% higher chance of going to university than those who do not.

Lucy Powell: Parents and teachers following this debate will have heard a Government Member say that the only way to guarantee an excellent education is to pay for it. The hon. Gentleman is rubbishing our excellent education system. The fact of the matter is that, yes, many parents want to select their children's education socially, but if we flip the issue and look at the situation for free school meal children, the hon. Gentleman will find that progress in the comprehensive system massively exceeds that in the private sector.

Chris Philp: It is clear in my area of Croydon that parents who want a particular kind of academic education have to travel out of the borough to either Bromley or Sutton because the kind of education that they want for their children is not available. That leads me on to my next point about parental choice. If parents want a particular kind of education for their children, it is not for this House to deny them that choice on ideological grounds. We should be enabling choice.

By the way, no Government Member is suggesting a return to the system under the Education Act 1944. No one is proposing the reintroduction of secondary moderns. We propose a diverse system with a whole range of schools with different specialisms. We already have many different kinds of academies and free schools, and grammar schools have a place in that diverse system along with other types of school. Parents can then exercise choice over which school works for them. It is clear that when free school meal children go to grammar schools, they do significantly better than if they do not.

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to my Treasury Committee colleague for giving way. Part of the explanation for his last point is that, given the very nature of academic selection, the higher-attaining pupils from the poorest backgrounds attend those schools. The evidence base as a whole shows that if a pupil from a deprived background goes to a grammar school, they are less likely to do as

well as their better-off counterparts, and the impact on the system as a whole is not positive. That is why every leading educational expert says that this is a bad policy.

Chris Philp: I refer my Treasury Committee colleague to the Education Policy Institute report that was published in September—it is quite recent, so perhaps he has not had a chance to read it—that found that the seven-grade advantage adjusts for prior academic attainment. Therefore, with the same level of attainment, a child on free school meals does better in a grammar school than they would if they went to a non-grammar school.

I have heard two objections to grammar schools from Opposition Members. There are two reasonable objections that one might make, so it is only fair to acknowledge them and try to respond. The first objection is that only 3% of grammar school pupils are on free school meals, whereas the figure for the population as a whole is 13%. It is reasonable for Members on both sides of the House to draw attention to that deficiency and to question it, but my answer to that challenge is that, by being inventive and creative, it is possible to increase that percentage radically. There is a fantastic example from the Schools of King Edward VI in Birmingham, which has increased its free school meal intake from 3% or 4% up to more than 20%, which is above the national average. That has been achieved through a series of innovative measures, including active outreach to primary schools in deprived areas, free help with tests for children from deprived families—one problem is that middle-class parents pay for coaching for their children—and bursaries for parents who are worried about the costs of uniforms, musical instruments or extra travel. By doing those things, the group has transformed its free school meal intake.

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend will be aware of the evidence given by Rebecca Allen of Datalab to the Education Committee that shows the negative impact on other grammar schools in that local area: they have lost more of their free school meal children. I think he needs to argue for an increase in the overall number of free school meal children if he wants his policies to work.

Chris Philp: I am arguing that grammar schools should do outreach, like those in the King Edward VI group, and ensure that the figure increases from 3% so that children from deprived backgrounds can get in and genuinely do well, which is not happening as much as it should. Wallington County Grammar School in my next-door borough of Sutton uses a slightly lower test threshold for free school meal children and has dramatically increased its intake from that group. I was happy to read on page 25 of the Green Paper that a number of the things that have worked in schools such as Wallington and those in the King Edward VI group will be conditions when existing grammar schools expand or new grammar schools open. By attaching those conditions, the Government will address the reasonable concerns that have been raised by Members on both sides of the House.

The second objection, to which the former Secretary of State just alluded, is that non-selective schools do worse in selective areas because the selective schools have in some way creamed off the best pupils. There is no clear evidence for that. There are reports from both

sides giving both points of view. In 2008, the Sutton Trust found no such effect; another study found an extremely marginal effect. We have already heard—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. We will not have sedentary interventions and the waving around of documents. It is simply not done in here.

Chris Philp: Thank you for defending me so valiantly, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West how Northern Ireland is an excellent case study of where the entire education system, not just grammar school pupils, has done well. In conclusion, with the reforms in the Green Paper, the system can work and help children from deprived backgrounds to fulfil their potential.

2.37 pm

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important but, sadly, repetitive debate. I say that because this issue rears its head every time we have a Conservative Government. Just what is the Conservative party's fascination with grammar schools? When it comes to social mobility, the Conservative's response seems to be to resort to dogma. The return to grammar schools embodies retrograde thinking and a return to a system that benefits only a select few—if anyone at all. There is no evidence, no justification and no basis for the belief that selective education leads to improved social mobility. The House does not have to take my word for it; the Government's own advisory body on social mobility, the Social Mobility Commission, says that grammar schools do not work.

Education is the single most important tool available to each and every Government to improve social mobility in this country. It is sad that this Government's fascination with selective education means that any genuine dialogue about how we can improve social mobility is lost in the noise of Tory MPs calling for the reintroduction of grammar schools. This debate is repeated time and again with the same conclusion: grammar schools do not work. There is no easy way to improve social mobility in this country and anyone who believes otherwise is sadly deluded. Social mobility can be improved only through a tide of political will, a slate of complex interventions and, most importantly, through unwavering investment over the long term, not just in one Parliament.

I am proud that such political will existed under the previous Labour Government; what followed was funding to help all children, not just the select few who are educated in our private school system, to realise their potential. Under a Labour Government, school budgets increased year on year. Under this Government, according to forecasts by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, school budgets will fall in real terms by 8% in this Parliament. Under a Labour Government, education maintenance allowance was introduced to help children from low-income families to continue in further education, whereas under the Conservative party EMA has been scrapped, the further education sector has faced real-terms cuts of 14%, and maintenance grants in the higher education sector are set to be scrapped. That is a recipe for a social mobility disaster, undermining all the progress made in

recent years to raise aspiration and improve life chances. At this time, my constituency needs more help, more investment and more long-term planning, not less.

In 2010-11, which was the last year of EMA, there were more than 8,000 recipients of it in the Bradford district. At that time, my constituency was ranked 64th nationally on the index of multiple deprivation. By 2015, however, Bradford South's position had worsened to 41st, which points to an increase in need and suggests that even more young people would have benefited from EMA. As I have told the House before, my constituency ranks 609th out of 650 for the percentage of individuals with level 4 qualifications or above. Furthermore, when it comes to the percentage of individuals without any qualifications, Bradford South is 74th in our league tables. Having a grammar school will not change that.

The Government should take a step back, reflect on their record in government—their flawed plans and inadequate investment—and do the right thing: end their fascination with grammar schools; summon the political will to back a slate of complex interventions; and, most importantly, commit to investment over the long term.

2.41 pm

Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): I welcome the debate, in which there appears to be wide agreement about the stagnant state of social mobility in the UK but less agreement on the right way to revive it. We have an elephant in the room in this debate: the deep philosophical differences between those inspired by a meritocratic vision of society and those who take the egalitarian view. That situation is perfectly healthy and respectable. Of course people who take the egalitarian view will find the idea of meritocracy very hard to reconcile with their world view. That is lurking, and some Labour Members ought to be a bit more honest about it. People hold other objections, which I also recognise. I support the meritocratic vision of fairness, not only on moral grounds but because it can, unlike the egalitarian mirage, reinforce, not paralyse, a healthy, vibrant and competitive economy which creates the jobs, wages and tax revenue for our precious public services.

I wish to discuss the evidence on selection, because there is strong evidence in favour of it—if it is done in the right way. We see that in the existing selection we have within schools; in the independent sector; at 16, when pupils want to stay on to do A-levels; and when students go to university. The motion says there is “no evidence” that selection—or any further selection—will improve social mobility, but this is clearly still a contentious issue. I am not saying it is cut and dried, but there is compelling evidence in favour of selection here: the review conducted by Sir Chris Woodhead, the former chief inspector of schools in 2009; and the evidence I heard in 2013 from Andreas Schleicher when I was serving on the Education Committee. He did not give an unequivocal view one way or another, but he did say that there was evidence that supported selection, provided admissions were done on a clear and objective basis and there were opportunities for selection later on.

The Opposition motion is therefore clearly flawed, but I accept that an expansion of grammars needs to be done in the right way, with tests that are fair and

[Mr Dominic Raab]

objective, minimising the scope for coaching, and with grammars schools expanded beyond a middle-class preserve. There is a strong case for making sure that the first tranche are in urban or rural areas with high levels of deprivation and low educational standards, both to create a ladder of opportunity for bright kids from the council estate or the rural backwater, and to have a beacon of educational excellence in those schools.

There is a reasonable question as to the age at which selection should take place. I certainly agree with Schleicher and the OECD that there ought to be doors for selection at different ages, to make sure that we do not close off opportunities for late developers. It also goes without saying that this is not a zero-sum game: we can support grammars and still want to raise standards across the whole state education system, particularly for the most deprived areas. That is what we have seen happening under this Government—1.4 million more children are going to schools deemed “good” or “outstanding” than were doing so in 2010—particularly through policies such as the pupil premium, which was specifically designed to target the children in the most deprived areas and to make sure that no child was left behind.

I support the Government’s proposals, but the other note of caution I sound is that grammars are not a silver bullet; they are one piece in patiently putting together the jigsaw that will help to revive social mobility. I support the Green Paper’s proposals on harnessing the talent, creativity and innovation of the independent sector. Indeed, I would go even further, as I like the idea of the Sutton Trust’s work to open up all independent schools on a meritocratic and means-tested basis. That would massively widen their intake of youngsters from humble backgrounds.

Notwithstanding the great strides we have made on apprenticeships and vocational training, this country still has a massive hang-up with the technical route for people to make a success of themselves. Whether we are talking about vocational training or apprenticeships, we do not have the same parity of esteem as there is in countries such as France, Switzerland and Germany. I would like to see us do more on those non-graduate routes to the professions so that we create the ladders of opportunities for not only bright academic youngsters, but for bright but not necessarily bookish youngsters.

When I look at the Green Paper overall, and not just what it says about grammars, I share the inspiring ambition that the Prime Minister has set out to make Britain the great meritocracy of the world. This is only the first step, but a lot of people are talking a good game about social mobility without being willing to get behind it, will it and deliver the means to it. On the basis that this is a first step, it has my full support.

2.46 pm

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): We face two major challenges in education in Britain. First, we are rapidly falling behind other countries for basic numeracy and literacy—not just Finland and South Korea, as has been traditional, but now even Estonia, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. That is one reason why Michael Wilshaw recently told the Education Committee that we have a mediocre education system in our country.

Secondly, with the innovation economy creating jobs at a much higher rate than the economy as a whole, and with jobs that require no skills or low skills disappearing at a rapid rate, we need to educate all our young people to a high standard.

However, as we have heard, last week’s Social Mobility Commission report shows that compared with children from the most advantaged areas, children from deprived areas are 27 times more likely to go to an inadequate school, more likely to drop out of education at 16, and 30% less likely to study A-levels that could get them into a top university. White working-class boys are even worse off. New research by the Sutton Trust shows that three quarters are being so badly let down that they are failing to achieve five good GCSE grades. Let us compare that with the situation for pupils from independent schools: just five public schools send more pupils to Oxbridge than 2,000 state schools—two-thirds of the entire state sector; and despite accounting for just 7% of school pupils, those from independent schools represent seven out of 10 High Court judges, more than half our leading journalists and doctors, and more than a third of MPs.

I want to see the whole country united around the mission of driving up standards and opening up opportunity for all pupils, but grammars can improve social mobility only if poor children are able to go to them. Analysis by the Education Datalab shows that poor children are much less likely to get in than their better-off peers. Poor children have already had a poorer start to their education by the age of 11, making it harder for them to get into grammar schools; but even where two children have the same scores at key stage 2, the poorer child is less likely to pass an entry exam and get into a grammar school. In fact, in areas with selective grammar schools the gap between rich and poor is greater than it is in areas without any grammar schools at all. Grammar schools also put a barrier between these pupils and some of the country’s most experienced teachers: the Education Datalab also shows that 54% of teachers at grammars have been in the profession for more than 10 years, whereas at a secondary modern just 41% have the same experience.

We should be doing the opposite. We should have better schools for every child, and we should expand the gifted and talented programme. Instead of using scarce resources on new grammar schools, we should focus on improving early years education and tackling stubborn levels of under-achievement in areas such as the black country, and areas across the midlands and the north. We should provide incentives and support to train experienced teachers, get them into schools with poorer children and help them stay in the profession. Anyone who visits a school that has been turned around or seen a dramatic improvement in results will know that it is impossible without the inspirational leadership that brilliant heads provide. We need new ways of identifying, recruiting and training a new generation of headteachers.

New grammars will not tackle the fundamental problems that our education system faces. They will not transform the quality of education for all pupils or tackle the social mobility crisis that exists in Britain. The policy will do nothing to tackle the chronic shortage of teachers—the teacher recruitment and retention crisis. It will not help to identify, train and recruit a new generation of brilliant heads, improve early years education, which is

the key to giving every child a first-class start, or improve the status and quality of vocational education. It will do nothing about the funding crisis facing post-16 education, and the deepest cuts that the further education sector has ever seen. Those are the issues that the Government should address.

We should all agree that education is our No. 1 priority. Let us sweep aside this old party political dogma. Instead of using time, energy and resources on expensive and time-consuming structural changes for which there is absolutely no evidence, let us have a national debate about education and involve all the parties, employers, and the teaching profession. Based on the evidence, we can then work out how a modern education system should be structured and what young people need to learn for the modern economy.

2.51 pm

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): The recent state of the nation report of the Social Mobility Commission highlights the challenges that we continue to face when it comes to tackling educational inequality and improving social mobility. Thanks to the Government's reforms since 2010, there are 1.4 million more children now attending schools that are rated "good" or "outstanding" compared with six years ago. Furthermore, £2.5 billion has been invested this year in the pupil premium, which is reducing the attainment gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their better-off peers in primary and secondary schools. I say to the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) that that is having a much bigger impact than EMA ever did or ever would have. However, there is still far more to do. Children living in the midlands or in the north have a smaller chance of attending a good school than children in the south. Just 5% of children eligible for free school meals are getting those five A grades at GCSE, while white working class boys, as we have heard many times today, are less likely to go to university than any other group in society.

As has been mentioned earlier, it is vital that appropriate support is targeted at children of a young age, as we know that educational inequalities start before children reach school age. Indeed, a report from the Institute for Public Policy Research earlier this year stated that children from the north are already behind their southern counterparts by the age of five. From September next year, the Government will double the current entitlement of 15 hours of free childcare a week for all three and four-years-olds in England to 30 hours—part of a record £6 billion per year investment in childcare by the end of this Parliament. The introduction of the early years pupil premium has equipped providers with the flexibility to innovate to improve the quality of early years provision for eligible children.

I shall briefly mention one incredibly important group of young people whom we must consider as part of this debate—children who are looked after in the state system. Outcomes for our looked-after children in education are poorer than their peers, and the gap gets wider as the children get older. Although trends in the educational attainment of looked-after children are generally improving, these children are still far less likely than their peers to receive good GCSE and A-level results and, indeed, tend not to go to university. When we speak about social mobility and ensuring that a child's background

should not determine how far they can go in life, it is imperative that we remain mindful of looked-after children and the sometimes unique obstacles that they face.

All this is where we are in our current system. We can all agree that despite the improvements that have been made since 2010, there is still a shortage of good school places and adequate choice for parents when it comes to choosing the best education for their child.

There are two grammar schools in my local area: Crossley Heath and North Halifax Grammar School. Both schools provide an excellent education to children and have proved incredibly popular with parents across Calderdale for many years. Sadly, although they are popular with all parents, it is only those in middle-income or high-net-worth families that tend to access those schools because of the costs associated with preparation for entry—whether tuition or private school. This has been a big bugbear of mine for many years. If our local primary schools are serious about social mobility and about access to the right school place for each individual child, why do they not offer tuition to access grammar schools for those children who are capable and come from less well-off means?

It is not because the schools cannot afford to do so—we have already heard how much they get from the pupil premium—but because they oppose the principle. Indeed, to the many Opposition Members who oppose selective education on principle, I would say that this discrimination is already an inbuilt part of the comprehensive system at present. Having a ban on grammar schools already causes an inbuilt discrimination against those without monetary means. Comprehensive schools also tend to be highly selective on wealth in other areas, as good and outstanding schools are disproportionately in well-to-do areas, and that is widely acknowledged.

Unfortunately, I do not have a great deal of time left, so I will be brief. In the interests of improving education standards and increasing choice for parents, there is a case for relaxing restrictions on selective education. That proposal, alongside other initiatives, will indeed increase social mobility.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Such is the ferocity of this debate and the number of interventions, I am afraid that we are over-running and I therefore have to reduce the time limit to four minutes. I call Liz Kendall.

2.56 pm

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Many hon. Members have already said that the Government's plans to expand grammar schools will increase, not reduce, social division. All the evidence shows that poor children are less likely to get into grammar schools, that poor children are more likely to fall even further behind their better-off peers and that the effects can be long lasting. Our opposition to grammar schools and to the Government's proposals does not mean that we are in any way complacent about the achievement gap between poor and better-off children at school—far from it.

Labour Members understand the complex problems that face many children and families in our most deprived areas, but that must never be used as an excuse for

[Liz Kendall]

tolerating failure or low expectations. We must be fearless champions of every child and always put their needs first.

Getting a great education is about more than our belief that everyone should have the chance to fulfil their potential. It must be at the heart of our response to globalisation, too. The world is changing faster than ever before. New technologies and markets emerge, and companies and jobs move, in what seems like a blink of an eye. This is opening up real opportunities for some, but it is also leaving too many people behind. Yet our response to global change cannot simply be to hold up a mirror to people's anger and despair. That leads nowhere, and does not create a single job or opportunity. Neither should we try to kid people that we can somehow turn back the clock, because we cannot stop technological change or the huge changes we are seeing in China, India and elsewhere. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) says, we must be the champions of a chance, not of a grievance. We should not shy away from change, but instead equip people with the skills, knowledge, chances and choices in life to make change work for them.

There are three priorities on which the Government should now focus, the first of which is early years. When poor children in my constituency start school up to 19 months behind their better-off peers, they play catch-up for the rest of their lives. They struggle to get five decent GCSEs let alone go to college or university or get a decent job.

Mr McFadden: I thank my hon. Friend for mentioning the early years. Does she think that, given the closures of Sure Start centres in recent years, the money devoted to this new policy would be better spent on early years intervention?

Liz Kendall: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend. There is nothing economically credible about paying more for problems that could have been prevented. Having a genuinely long-term economic policy means prioritising the early years. We should make it a national mission that every child starts school ready to learn. If the Prime Minister really wants a country that works for everyone, she should scrap the Government's £1 billion inheritance tax cut for the wealthiest few and put that money into transforming early years services instead.

All the evidence shows that strong leadership and great teachers make the biggest difference in improving attainment in schools, particularly for disadvantaged children. For poor pupils, the difference between having a good teacher and a poor teacher is a whole year's learning. Those pupils cannot wait and we should not let them. The Government should be focusing relentlessly on getting the best heads and teachers into the most challenging schools. New incentives should also be trialled, such as writing off a proportion of teachers' student loans for each year that they teach at a particularly challenging school.

Ian Austin: Does my hon. Friend agree that expanding Teach First would be a good way of getting more high quality teachers into struggling schools?

Liz Kendall: Indeed. I have seen in my own constituency the huge difference that Teach First teachers make in the most challenging schools, such as Fullhurst in my constituency.

The Government should look at trialling a new Help to Buy scheme for teachers who agree to move to areas with struggling schools. Both of these initiatives could be paid for by reforming the existing, expensive bursary scheme.

Finally, we must transform vocational education to equip people with the skills they need to succeed in the global economy. Britain has nowhere near enough apprenticeships of high enough quality, focusing on the skills that our country really needs. Two thirds of the apprenticeships created in recent years were only at level 2 or GCSE equivalent, and three quarters of them went to people aged over 25 who were already in work. This is in stark contrast to countries such as Germany, which has much higher levels of participation and where 90% of apprenticeships are three to four-year programmes at level 3 or higher.

If the Government are serious about tackling skills shortages and helping people cope with globalisation, they need to create up to 300,000 quality apprenticeships at level 3 or higher every single year. They should focus on areas with the biggest skills gap, such as science, technology, engineering and maths, help more small firms take part with minimal bureaucracy, and ensure that young people can move from vocational to academic qualifications—and vice versa—at every stage post-16.

When I visit schools in my constituency, I see the energy, hope and enthusiasm in the children's eyes, but I know that the cards are stacked against them before they have even begun, in a world that is now so unforgiving of people without skills. It is my job—and all our jobs—to break down the barriers to their success. Expanding grammar schools is not the answer, and will do nothing to address the very real challenges created by globalisation. The Government must think again.

3.2 pm

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I am a Conservative because I believe fiercely in aspiration. I believe, too, that it does not matter where people start in life, what their parents did or how wealthy their family is—people can achieve their dreams and improve their life through their own endeavours, dedication and an attitude of service and community. That, for me, is real compassion, and it is no more abundantly clear than in relation to the education policies and achievements of this Government and this party.

If we look at the evidence, we realise that the Opposition have no grounds to complain. When Labour left office in 2010, two in five children were leaving secondary school functionally illiterate or innumerate—two in five, in a country with some of the best schools in the world. That is unacceptable and a scandal. Employers had lost confidence in exams because of grade inflation, and kids were made to catch up when they got to university. Thanks to the bold reforms of structures and standards, progress has been made. The free schools movement has reinvigorated the teaching profession to inject innovation and allow teachers and schools to provide the standards they want in their community.

Prior to my election to Parliament, I co-founded and now chair one of the early free schools, Michaela community school, in my home town, Wembley. We are now in our third year of opening. It is a secondary school in a run-down part of London. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds—40% are Afro-Caribbean, more than 50% are on the pupil premium, nearly half speak English as a second language, and one in five has special educational needs. One third of pupils start at Michaela community school with a reading age below their chronological age; many have been thrown out of their previous schools. However, our philosophy of an academically rigorous curriculum, high expectations and zero tolerance of poor behaviour has proved popular with children and parents in the area. Every child is treated as though they have the potential to get to Oxbridge, even if some enter with low attainment and poor behaviour. We have children who make five years' progress in reading in one year. That is because of our invigorated teachers, innovation in teaching and the standards that we apply.

Our teachers recently published a book about what makes Michaela excellent. I am going to read a story about one of our pupils, Korey, who joined Michaela community school last September.

"He is black, has special educational needs and lives on an estate. His mother and grandmother were desperate. His father was absent. His primary school said that he was the worst-behaved child they had ever seen. We happily invited Korey into Michaela."

We are a very inclusive school. My headmistress, Katharine Birbalsingh, explained to Korey's mother

"how the school works, why we have silent classrooms with hard-working children, learning more than anyone would have imagined possible, even more than their counterparts at private schools."

At Michaela we have

"silent and orderly corridors, and lunch halls that are free from bullying, our playground where children are able to be children. It works because we do not pander to every parental whim, making exceptions in order to 'accommodate'."

Helen Whatley (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Does the school that my hon. Friend chairs focus on the quality of teaching, which we know is so important for high achievement in schools?

Suella Fernandes: Exactly. It is the quality of teaching that has made the difference to Korey's life, for example. He is now one of our extraordinary successes. He has progressed in reading and numeracy and his behaviour is transformed. It is quality of teaching and high expectations that make the difference to our children.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree that quality teaching need not take place within the confines of a grammar school, and that it can take place in a quality comprehensive?

Suella Fernandes: Quality teaching is what makes the difference. Empowered heads, impassioned teachers, high standards and rigour—that is what is working in our schools. That is why we have seen progress. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards because he has focused relentlessly and tirelessly on phonics, for example. Since the phonics test was introduced in 2012, we have seen thousands more children achieving the basic requirements in literacy, enabling them to

enjoy reading. We have seen the introduction of the EBacc, an academically rigorous curriculum that is raising standards for thousands of children around the country. That is what makes a difference, and it is the Conservative party that is standing up and calling out low standards.

In our schools' structures and standards, the Conservative party has made a massive difference in trying to remedy the failings of the Labour party in education. On grammar schools, Labour has got it wrong again. What parents like about grammar schools and what pupils cherish in those schools is exactly the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whatley)—high quality teaching, high standards, zero tolerance of bad behaviour and the cultivation of an environment where studying is valued and confidence is engendered. That is what works in schools. Why does the Labour party want to curb that and restrict a whole generation of children from accessing excellent schools, excellent teachers and innovation in our schools? The Opposition should be ashamed of themselves and they should support this policy as much as they can.

3.8 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The question that we are all trying to answer today is, "If you are talented, can you succeed in modern Britain? And why does it matter if you can't?" We should be unashamedly selfish about social mobility. Living in a country where more people can achieve their potential means that they are more likely to do things which help us all, whether they invent new forms of energy or become doctors, entertainers or even MPs. When brains, not birth, form the basis of achievement, we all benefit. That is why it matters that social mobility is stuck in Britain. It is wasting the potential to change the world.

In my short contribution today, I want to take up the challenge posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), who spoke about the repetition in this debate, and offer the challenge that focusing on schools and education is not enough. We also have to address the divisions in access to finance and networks, which continue to hold back too many in our country. Bluntly, we have to address the fact that it is the bank of mum and dad—and all that it offers in terms of cash and connections—that increasingly makes a difference to social mobility in our modern world, and that we miss a trick if we do not think about those things.

We should make no mistake: education too often drives outcomes, and money and privilege have a big hand in that, as many Members have already set out. That is not just about academic talent; it is also about creative talent, and the same patterns are clear in acting and sport, although with the possible exception of music. Surely, however, our answer to young, bright children cannot be that we think they should go on "The X Factor"—we know they have the X factor.

Instead, we have to understand the barriers they face in this post-Brexit, low-growth world, where constant, disruptive technological change means they will hold seven different jobs in their lifetime—two of which have not yet been invented. If we do not address those barriers, too many children will not get those opportunities. It is in that environment that we need to understand

[Stella Creasy]

how access to finance makes a difference. Housing has come to dominate not just catchment areas, but families' options for subsidising their children, whether that is remortgaging and starting up a business or being able to help their children go to university.

This is also about understanding how, in today's disruptive world, the bank of mum and dad can be the difference in terms of taking the leap between one career and the next. With half of all today's students chasing careers that will be made obsolete by technology and automation, we cannot afford to ignore this challenge.

Where previous generations fought to ensure that their children could advance up the career ladder, the next generation will thrive only if it can access multiple livelihoods. Many ladders are being taken away just as they are being created. Our new elite will be those with not just the money to start again, but the contacts and the confidence to get their foot in many doors.

In the face of such uncertainty about traditional career paths, one great hope for us should be the entrepreneurship among our young adults. However, what do we have to offer those young entrepreneurs? Whether someone is educated at university or wants to start a new business or to go into further education, the bank of mum and dad offers not just money but contacts and networks, in a world where access to internships and unpaid experience all too often defines outcomes.

That is why it is time for us to think again. It is time to ask how we ensure that not just 50% but 100% of all 18-year-olds can take out a loan for the pathway they want to take. It is time to ask how we can make sure every child can access that educational work experience or internship opportunity, not just those with the parents who can get them in the door or who can pay for them to do that work. It is time to ask why on earth the last Government got rid of the child trust fund and to bring it back in time to help the next generation of children to move forward.

Michael Young talked about a meritocracy. That is why grammar schools are such an outmoded way of thinking. The future will be about the many different doors we want children to be able to walk through and about making sure that the bank of mum and dad is open to every single young person, not just the few.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I am afraid we have to reduce the time limit to three minutes.

3.12 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): For me, social mobility is one of the most fundamental objectives of an education system and a Government—it runs deep in my veins. Last week, I had to give a tribute to my father, who recently died of mesothelioma. Without his commitment to my education, as somebody who, like my mother, left school at 16, I would not have had the opportunity to break free from a pattern of manual work, work in service or growing plants, as he did.

Each morning when I leave my flat, I see a framed letter from King George VI in 1943 to my great-great-aunt Maud, who worked as a maid in Buckingham Palace.

I regard the fact that, in three generations, members of my family can move from being maids to Members of Parliament as a function of the social mobility that should exist in our country. Before it is suggested that, somehow, being a Member of Parliament is the summit of human achievement, let me say that I certainly do not believe that that is the case.

What I do believe is that education is about choices. I want to address the core motivation that may exist in the minds of those who sought this debate—that grammar schools somehow restrict social mobility to a chosen few, consigning children who go to non-grammars to a future without such opportunities. It is my contention that education is not about the type of school, but about instilling a fundamental belief in the value of hard work. It is about access to high-quality teaching for all and about rigorous standards in education, whatever the type of school. It is also about parental support and encouragement—something we have not heard much about today.

My father passed his 11-plus and he got some O-levels, but whereas his parents fundamentally did not see the point of further study, his grandsons see a very different focus, as my sister and I try to take advantage of every learning opportunity. So let us conceive of education and social mobility not simply as a function of school type. Let us value the framework that surrounds school attendance—the teaching, resources and esteem.

I also want to challenge the notion of stigma—the belief that, if one does not pass the 11-plus, one is consigned to a different life trajectory. It is said by some that such a child is labelled a failure. That is not my experience, looking at the eight secondary schools in my constituency.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): My hon. Friend makes an important point about 11 not being the cut-off point that defines a child's future. Does he support the proposal, which some colleagues have referred to, that there should be multiple entry points into any new grammar schools?

John Glen: Absolutely. I totally welcome that point. I welcome the value that we see in university technical colleges, studio schools, academies and the range of other options that exist. There is a lot of mobility between those schools and a lot of transferring to grammar schools at sixth form.

It is wrong to suggest that we should have targets for where children go when they leave school—a target of a certain number going to university. We need to work hard in the House to generate parity of esteem for apprenticeships, higher-level apprenticeships, vocational education and all types of higher education. We should enable movement to these different settings at different stages.

The fact that so many of Salisbury's young people go to the grammar schools for sixth form is testimony to the enduring quality of those schools' academic A-level offer. However, the fact that other young people choose the excellent free sixth form is a reflection of how it provides for the diverse needs that grammars do not provide for and of how grammars do not suit all children.

We need to recognise that social mobility is achieved by embracing the broadest possible range of options, by encouraging specialisms and diversity and by valuing the widest context for learning for our young people.

3.17 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Social mobility is an issue for the white working class. It is an issue that we have failed to discuss in this debate. Only 32% of working-class white British students receiving free school meals achieved the GCSE benchmark last year. That is compared with 44% of mixed-race students, 55% of Bangladeshi students, 42% of black Caribbean students and 47% of Pakistani students, all of whom were also receiving free school meals. That has happened because the educational attainment of white working-class students has improved much more slowly than that of almost any other ethnic group over the last 10 years.

I could take Members of this House to the grammar schools in Sutton, next to my constituency, and I could show them classes of young first and second-generation Tamil kids on free school meals. They are there because their parents understand the importance of education. They live the immigrants' dream, which many Members of this House have shared and benefited from. However, our own white working-class kids are not getting the benefit. The issue is so much bigger than the type of school; it is about all social inputs.

We know from the Education Committee's report into underachievement among white working-class kids that going to a good school disproportionately benefits poor white kids. There are schools out there doing a brilliant job and changing lives. I would like to suggest that, as in so many cases, Members have a look at the Harris academy chain in south London. Last year, about 56% of white British students nationwide secured five A to C GCSEs. However, at Harris Greenwich in 2015, 60% of white British students secured those grades. Just five years ago, the school—then the Eltham Foundation—was in special measures. However, now, under the excellent leadership of a strong principal, George McMillan, it has undertaken quite an unimaginable transformation. Harris Falconwood has a staggering 73% of white British students securing these grades. Yet again, the rate of success of this school is incredible. In 2008, only 17% of students achieved these grades, but under the leadership of principal Terrie Askew, the school is now judged "outstanding" by Ofsted. These schools should be our ideals, regardless of whether they are mainstream, grammars or academies. I am enormously grateful to Lord Harris for his involvement in the schools in my constituency, but I am also grateful to all the people who lead and teach in our schools.

3.20 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I feel keenly the importance of every child having a chance to succeed, never more so than when I visit schools in my constituency or drop my own children off at school and see bright faces in the playground or lined up with crossed legs in assembly, full of hope and potential. The question today is how we best nurture that potential and enable every child to make the most of their talents. From pre-school, through primary and secondary school, and on to further education, every stage is an opportunity. Indeed, at every stage there is also a risk that some children may do less well, relatively, but fear of difference in results must not drive policy, as I fear it does for some Opposition Members.

There is a clear consensus in the House about the importance of pre-school education and early years education—primary school. Progress is being made in these areas, particularly in the improvement of standards in primary schools, but there is more to be done, particularly so that children arrive at reception already having good language skills, particularly in their first language, which is not always the case.

Today we are talking primarily about selection. Opposition MPs have been attacking academic selection but, oddly, not any other forms of selection. They have not countered the points made about why they are so happy about selection for sports or arts, nor made it clear where they stand on existing grammar schools. They appear to have a pretty confused policy. I stand here representing a constituency in Kent where we have excellent grammar schools that are extremely popular with parents. I urge Opposition Members to listen to parents who like those schools and try to understand why.

Significant misinformation has been put out about achievement in Kent's education system. Children in Kent achieve above the national average in their GCSEs. The system works well. Within that system, in particular, children from low-income families, on free school meals or in receipt of the pupil premium are doing especially well in our grammar schools. That enables those children to make up the gap between themselves and other children with greater advantages.

Suella Fernandes: Can my hon. Friend inform the House how many children who go to grammar schools go on to university, or to Russell Group universities?

Helen Whately: We know that children are much more likely to go on to Russell Group universities if they have attended grammar schools.

In Kent, an increasing number of children who have received the pupil premium are attending grammar schools, so Kent is working at widening access. I really welcome the points in the Government's Green Paper on widening access so that more children have a chance to attend excellent grammar schools. One of the critical things is whether primary school headteachers support their pupils in getting into grammar schools. For primary schools that do so, that makes a huge difference; for those that do not, that is a real disadvantage to those children. I would like more schools to emulate our best primary schools, where children are supported to go to what is the best school for them. We also have grammar schools that favour in their admissions criteria children on low incomes. They are undertaking outreach to primary schools to make sure that children who have the right academic potential to do well in grammar schools get a place and can make the most of that potential.

Finally on the experience in Kent, I want to emphasise the cases where selective and non-selective schools are working very well together as part of a trust. An excellent example of that is Valley Invicta Trust. I encourage the shadow Secretary of State to come and visit so that she can see a comprehensive school and a grammar school in one go, and see the excellent results that both those schools are getting for their pupils.

Before I conclude, I should mention the importance, underlying all this, of high-quality teaching. What academies and grammar schools are doing so well is making sure that their teachers provide excellent teaching so that all the children who go to those schools can truly succeed.

3.24 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this vital debate, which goes to the heart of how we grow prosperity and share it for all.

We live in a divided nation, and the divisions are becoming deeper and more entrenched. Children in this country should feel that they have a society and a Government who are on their side, but poverty is on the increase and social mobility has stalled. I want to share a few perspectives from my constituency—to give a dose of reality about what life is like on the ground—and call on the Government to reverse their cuts to school budgets.

The lives of thousands of young people are being blighted by family poverty, and low educational attainment often flows from that family stress. Schools that can and should be engines of opportunity and mobility are themselves struggling, and now find themselves filling the welfare gap. I pay tribute to a number of schools in my constituency that have helped to research how we can come together as a local community much more so that we support them as they struggle, particularly Cranford Community College, Springwest Academy and Reach Academy.

The Social Mobility Commission's report last week was a grim read, stating that

"Britain has a deep social mobility problem which is getting worse for an entire generation of young people".

According to the commission, those born in the 1980s are the first generation since the second world war not to start their careers with higher incomes than their parents and immediate predecessors. We also know that more than a third of our young people nationally—it is the same in Hounslow in my constituency—are leaving school without the equivalent of five good GCSEs. That is a matter of shame for us all. It is the case for 900 young people in Hounslow alone per year.

My recent conversations with headteachers about the impact of benefits changes and rising family poverty are revealing consistent themes. A picture emerges of families struggling to make ends meet and not always being able to afford food, of children arriving at school hungry, of housing stress, of overcrowding in damp conditions that hampers children's ability to study and parents' ability to work, and of rising family debt whereby parents have to borrow money for school uniforms and shoes. Schools try to help. One teacher has told me that they hand out money for shoes two or three times a day.

There is no getting away from the fact that Government cuts are making life harder for families and schools. The choices made by this Government and by the previous Chancellor show that there can be no greater false economy than underfunding our schools. It is time that the Government did more than give us the rhetoric—time that they understood that the reality of the choices they make are having an impact on the lives and prospects of children across this country.

3.27 pm

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I have sat here for hours listening to one Opposition Member after another criticising Government policies and trying to offer a few policies of their own. The interesting

thing is that not one of those Opposition speakers has mentioned the fact that for the past 18 years they have been implementing their policies in another corner of the United Kingdom, which I come from: Wales. On any reasonable comparison of the difference between the education systems in England and in Wales, England comes out on top, and I say that as an ex-Welsh comprehensive school pupil with three children currently going through the state system in Wales.

The comparisons are absolutely clear. Fewer teachers take time off for sickness in England than in Wales. More money is spent per head on pupils in England than in Wales. Children in England have a much better chance of getting into university, as a headline from the BBC made clear only a month or two ago: "Top grade A-level performance falls in Wales". Pupils in England have a better chance of getting into the best universities and a better chance of getting a first-class honours degree than pupils in Wales.

Why is that? It is because in Wales Labour has followed the outdated policies that it tries to suggest that we impose in England. The Labour Government in Wales have scrapped testing. They do not like streaming or any kind of selection. They do not like classroom assessments, because they think that those assessments put teachers under pressure. They do not want to give parents the choice that my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards wants to give them in England.

No one has to take my word for that; they can look at PISA reports—the independent OECD surveys of education systems around the world, including those in the United Kingdom—which clearly show that England is doing far better than Wales. Alternatively, they can look at Estyn reports, a recent one of which showed that Wales is lagging far behind England in areas such as English language. Even if people are not convinced by those neutral reports, they can read what former Labour Education Ministers in Wales have said. Leighton Andrews said

"we took our eye off the ball",

while Huw Lewis issued an apology to the learners of Wales for the Welsh Labour Government's failed policies. Labour Members like to promise a nation fit from cradle to grave, but as far as education is concerned, they have delivered a failure from the nursery to the bursary.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): Unsurprisingly, speaking as a fellow Welsh Member, I think that the hon. Gentleman is painting a rather bleak picture of the education system in Wales. He talks about Estyn, but does he not acknowledge that the Conservative-led county council for his own constituency was put into special measures by Estyn because of weak leadership? The quotes from Leighton Andrews and Huw Lewis are a considerable number of years out of date. Over the past five years, there have been improvements to GCSE and A-level results, and the gap has closed significantly because of underperformance in England and improved performance in Wales.

David T. C. Davies: I notice that the hon. Gentleman says that the gap has closed, but he does not say that Wales is doing any better than England. In actual fact, one of the headlines I referred to is only a couple of months old, so there are still many problems here.

In England, we have rejected the sort of left-wing, anti-selection, anti-testing, anti-choice dogma that Labour has followed since the 1960s, which is completely out of date. That is why we are delivering higher standards for pupils in England than for those in Wales. It is why Labour Members do not want to talk about their failures in Wales. It is why former Labour Education Ministers from Wales are having to apologise to their own constituents for their failures.

Members of the public know perfectly well that this Government can be trusted on the economy, on defence, on law and order, and on immigration, but there are still some people who think that Labour can be trusted more on public services. The reality is that we have put public services at the heart of our agenda, and we will continue to do so. We should loudly and proudly shout from the rooftops about the enormous successes we have delivered in education, health and other public services for the people of England.

3.31 pm

Corri Wilson (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): The evidence about the adverse effects of poverty on educational attainment and achievement is undeniable. My constituency has one of the highest child poverty rates in Scotland. In some parts of my constituency, one in three children are living in poverty. Data from the 10-year study “Growing Up in Scotland” show that children living in poverty are much more likely than others to face social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, to be overweight and to have multiple other problems. All those factors will have an impact on their future attainment and achievement.

Poverty ruins childhoods and reduces life chances. I am proud that the Scottish Government are focusing on closing the attainment gap and that the First Minister has made education a priority. A higher percentage of entrants to Scottish universities are from our poorest communities. The gap in academic achievement between our 20% most deprived pupils and our 20% least deprived pupils has reduced. The gap between those from the most and least deprived communities in positive school-leaver destinations is narrowing. Part of that is down to the fantastic work of many of our universities and colleges, which are working on positive routes into higher education. I pay particular tribute to Ayrshire College, Scotland’s Rural College and the University of the West of Scotland, all of which have campuses in my constituency, for the efforts that they have made to encourage and support students in the transition between further and higher education.

In Scotland, we are far from complacent on this issue. More needs to be done, and more is being done. When we see the attainment gap starting long before children get to school, it is clear we need to focus on early learning and education. While the UK Government pursue their damning and divisive obsession with grammar schools, the Scottish Government are doing everything possible to ensure that each child has access to the same opportunities, no matter what their background is.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the education system in Scotland, which prioritises the ability to learn, not the ability to pay, enables more students to attend university

because their tuition fees are covered by the Scottish Government, whereas the English system denies students that opportunity?

Corri Wilson: I agree 100% with what my hon. Friend says.

Our curriculum for excellence is combining academic excellence with the attitudes and skills for success, and it is giving young people the opportunity to gain vocational qualifications without being seen as second best. In Scotland, we are making progress on ensuring that every child has the ability to reach their full potential—from baby boxes to free university tuition, we are working hard to improve life chances and aid social mobility—but, ultimately, our efforts in the education system are tackling a symptom not the cause of inequality.

The Prime Minister has said that her Government are committed to fighting injustice wherever it arises. A substantial body of research shows that poverty has a devastating impact on the lives of young people across the UK. We live in a society where the rich enjoy the trappings of wealth and the poor rely on food parcels from charities. Far from fighting injustice, this Government are driving people further into poverty while offering to syphon off a few of the brightest poor kids for a place in their grammar schools and pretending that that is equality. A two-tier system is totally unacceptable.

3.35 pm

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): In January, the ceremony to open the new £25 million Newark Academy was cancelled because the teachers were out on strike. On the same day, a window cleaner from South Leventon who came to my surgery said that he could not send his bright son to the local grammar school in Gainsborough, which is across the border in Lincolnshire, because he could not afford the £400 a year it would cost to get him there every day. This year, more than 50% of the children in my town are going to schools out of town, and they are the 50% who can afford to do so, not the 50% who might need that the most. It is no coincidence that Newark and Sherwood district is among the areas in the United Kingdom where social mobility is at its lowest.

The story of Newark secondary schools is a near-complete description of the failings of our state schools since the 1960s: the destruction of a successful grammar school, the Magnus, which had been established in 1531; the pre-emption of places at the good schools in neighbouring, better-off towns by articulate parents with the resources to work the system to their advantage and to afford the cost of travelling to them, given that such an option was not available in their own town; the flight of middle-class parents to Lincolnshire for grammar schools, for which demand was extremely high, but for which one needs £500 to £1,000 a year to bus one’s child to school; the tolerance of failure—or at least of consistent underperformance—and a great deal of complacency and hand wringing, with lines such as, “What do you expect? It’s only Newark”; and the gradual decline in aspiration and a pervasive culture of low expectations, including the kicking away of the ladder out of ignorance and poverty by neglect and complacency dressed up as egalitarian, progressive education policy.

Suella Fernandes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the culture of low expectations and the soft bigotry of a “prizes for all” culture is exactly what needs to be changed and what this Government are standing up against?

Robert Jenrick: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend.

In Newark, social inequality is not the problem, but the symptom of a real malaise. The condition of the town's education has been allowed to reach an appalling level. Having diagnosed the problems—the lack of a choice of school, an unwillingness to intervene, and an unwillingness to embrace selection in any form, even when parents are crying out for it—there are many solutions. In my town, armed with a range of tools, we are starting to make progress under this Government, and I am convinced that we have finally turned the corner.

We intervened to remove the sponsor of the Newark Academy, which was not working, and brought in the No. 1 school in the county to run it, thanks to Conservative policy. In September 2017, we will open a new free school in Newark, of which I have the pleasure of being a governor. It will be committed to the highest standards of education, discipline and character formation, and to repatriating children from across the county whose parents have had to send them away. The diocese of Southwell and Nottingham, which runs the other school in the town—the Magnus—has now increased its commitment to driving up standards as a result of the competition and choice that we are now putting into the system. The apprenticeship levy is forcing a long-overdue conversation between the employers in the town and the schools.

The common thread that runs through all these policies is parental choice. Parents in my town want the choice to send their children to the school that suits them and their needs, rather than being told by others that only the privileged few who can afford the bus fare or the fees at a private school deserve it.

3.39 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I do not want to repeat the many excellent points that Members have made. If you will excuse me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will indulge in a moment of pedantry.

The subject of the debate is “social mobility”, and that is not a one-way ticket; one can go up or down. There was a lot of social mobility during the great depression, most of it downwards, and the happiest societies are not necessarily those with the greatest levels of social mobility.

I have noticed that many people who bang on about social mobility are rather quiet on the subject of social inequality. The assumption must be that any level of social inequality is acceptable as long as there is some social mobility. I have a problem with that assumption, even if it is very comforting for those who have wealth and privilege to hang on to. It is easier to call for the wider distribution of opportunity than the wider distribution of wealth, even when there is evidence that societies without vast differences in wealth are happier. People who have read “The Spirit Level” by Richard Wilkinson will be mindful of that point.

The vast differences in wealth between individuals in modern society are growing, as we see if we examine the wage ratios between those at the top and bottom of most businesses and compare them with what they were in the '50s, '60s and '70s. It is hard to believe that that is due to super talent. Regardless of this debate, we should all worry if hard work cannot result in a decent standard

of living for the less talented in an affluent society—people are struggling in the gig economy, with no security and poor housing prospects, and some are living hand to mouth—even if there is some prospect of social mobility.

Education, however good, cannot make us all talented and cannot give us all the same life chances. I am sure the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) agrees with that. Sometimes, education is not sufficient even to improve children's life chances. Often we need cultural changes that go beyond the child—changes in the community, parents and society. Housing, economic growth, low crime rates and local empowerment are all key determinants of mobility and social aspiration in any area. Education by itself is rarely sufficient.

That is probably why, despite the many schemes in places such as Knowsley and the many millions that are spent on education there—I think that one scheme cost £157 million—we have failed to produce improvement across the board. Yes, Knowsley is at the bottom of the league for educational achievement, but it is also second bottom for deprivation. There is a connection somewhere.

We have heard in this debate that the magic ingredient we need for Knowsley is a grammar school. Middle-class tiger parents will not cry about working-class kids, as is the case in other areas. I have heard it said that Knowsley has never had a grammar school, but that is false. It did pioneer comprehensive education, but I had the privilege of going to a grammar school in Knowsley—Prescot Grammar School. The grammar school recipe has been tried, but it did not move the dial notably.

3.42 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): I am very grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me towards the end of this interesting debate.

I have noticed that there is a gaping hole at the centre of the Opposition's case on grammar schools. If grammar schools are based on a good principle, why would Labour oppose extending them? And if they are based on a bad principle, why is it not committed to abolishing them? Surely, if it is a good idea, a cap or ban is a crazy way to proceed if we want to widen opportunity and choice. If it is a bad idea, why should we allow grammar schools to exist? Why should we allow the existing grammar schools to continue providing a bad education, if indeed they are bad schools and it is a bad principle? It cannot be the case that the number of grammar schools in this country as of 2016 should be fixed in aspic for ever more and never increase. That would be a very illogical way to proceed.

Secondly, I want to pick up on the idea of elite education. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), who I am glad is in his place, made the point that everyone in the House is happy to see elite soccer teams, musicians and gymnasts educated in private facilities, private schools and even some state schools on a selective basis, yet when it comes to a broad education, somehow it is a taboo issue.

The other issue raised was the fact that we have independent schools. Even if we abolished every single grammar school in the country, we would still have a system in which private schools could be attended by very wealthy—and often very talented—people, accentuating existing differences and inequalities.

Labour's position is entirely incoherent. It has not given a single indication of what it wants to do with grammar schools. Does it agree with them in principle, or is it against them? If it is against them, why does it not have the courage to say publicly that it will abolish them?

The proposals in the Green Paper are actually quite mild. No one is suggesting that we go back to the 1950s or some sheep and goats, be all and end all 11-plus. Rather, we are saying that there should be diversity of provision. People should be able to access selective education not simply because they can afford to but because they have the abilities and aspiration to do so. We want a diverse system from which all children can benefit.

3.45 pm

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I declare an interest at the start, in that my wife is a primary school teacher. I shall focus the majority of my brief contribution on education as a key social enabler.

The Scottish Government are embarking on an Administration-defining mission to close the attainment gap between the most and least affluent school pupils. Nicola Sturgeon's Government are to allocate £750 million during the course of the Scottish parliamentary term through the Attainment Scotland fund and focus on improvement in the key areas of literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing.

That is a welcome intervention, but, in terms of education policy, most crucial in narrowing the attainment gap and realising social mobility will be the Scottish Government's support for local authorities on teacher numbers and retention. The Scottish Government have a good record on that front. In 2006, 16,000 primary 1 children were being taught in classes of 26 or more; as of 2015, that was down to 657. That is very important for me, as a recent report highlighted that and Shotts has, in some areas, 32% of children living in poverty.

The End Child Poverty figures should shame us all and serve as a big wake-up call to North Lanarkshire Council, which failed to maintain teacher numbers last year, despite having some of the highest levels of child poverty in Scotland. I encourage the Scottish Government to keep pressing local authorities on the number of teachers and classroom assistants in employment, so as to help those areas, such as Airdrie Central ward in my constituency, that have such high child poverty ratios.

It is important for us to get it right for children as early as possible, as highlighted by Action for Children. That is why recent and planned childcare interventions up the road are so important, on top of the childcare plans outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan). Every nursery in the poorest local areas will have an additional qualified teacher or childcare graduate by 2018. It was also recently announced that childcare funding will change to follow the child, a very welcome intervention. In another welcome development, every child born in Scotland will receive a baby box—a box of essential items to help level the playing field in the very first days of their life—starting next year.

If we are serious about improving social mobility and helping people along, however, the UK Government must do more in other areas. I hope tomorrow's autumn

statement will see greater investment in good quality affordable and social housing. We should also expect plans from the UK Government on how they hope to overturn the stagnation in average wages since 2009.

Education policy can help children out of poverty to some extent, but we cannot expect teachers to fix everything for us in this regard. The real win will come when this Government commit to addressing the causes of child poverty: low incomes, poor housing, social security cuts and insecure work.

3.48 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): To me, the conundrum seems to be how we break the grammar school system's current status as perhaps the preserve of the middle class while at the same time not going backwards to what I would call the apartheid system that used to be in place.

I refer to that because I failed my 12-plus, as it was, and went to a secondary modern school. In my small town there were two schools, the Royal Latin School and the secondary modern, divided by one hedge. Siblings were unable to talk to each other across the hedge, because the grammar school head refused to countenance it. Pupils at the secondary modern left school at 16—they were told by their teachers that there was little point in going on to do A-levels, because why would someone like them pass A-levels? I ignored that advice and I am glad I did. I would certainly not vote for a return to a grammar school system that took us back to those days.

Equally, we have the huge problem of grammar schools being the preserve of the middle class. My constituency in East Sussex borders Kent. In my daughter's primary school in East Sussex, a quarter of the class moved over to the grammar school, leading to a brain drain from East Sussex. Only those parents who can afford to pay the increase in house prices will see their children go to the grammar school that, while based on ability, is catchment-based. Entrance to another school is based on pure ability, so only parents who can afford the tuition, rail fare or prep school fees to have got their children to the school in the first place will be able to enjoy it. I therefore maintain that the current system does not work.

Should we stick or should we twist? I was surprised by the Opposition spokesperson's speech. I expected the Opposition to state that the system does not work at all and that it should be abolished. If they wish to continue with the status quo, they will inadvertently support this middle class preserve. Perhaps somewhat reluctantly, I welcome the shift in the Government's approach towards the expansion of grammar schools. The situation in relation to social mobility is so bad that something has to be done.

I spent the past couple of days reading research from the past 50 years. It is completely inconclusive on which system, comprehensive or grammar, is better. What is undeniable, however, is that our social mobility statistics are so bad that something must be done. Those on the Government Front Bench must reflect on whether creating more grammar schools, and perhaps taking us back to towns with a choice of two schools, means inadvertently moving back to a situation in which the choice is either success or failure. There must be success for all, regardless of entrance tests.

3.51 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Last week, in my capacity as the chair of the all-party group on social mobility, I attended the launch of the Social Mobility Commission's annual report. What I heard amounted to a damning indictment of the status quo: for too long, we have been too ready to accept that those from poorer backgrounds will proportionally do worse; for too long, we have allowed privilege and connections to override ability and potential; and for too long, we have deluded ourselves that economic growth translates into increased prosperity and opportunity for all. Let us invest in our children in their early years and let us have a school system that offers opportunity for all, but let us not kid ourselves that that will be enough if we continue to have a country where access to opportunity is completely closed off to huge sections of society.

The all-party group on social mobility is currently conducting an inquiry into access to the professions. Our report is due out soon. We saw many similarities between the evidence we heard and the commission's findings. One such area was internships. Too often, internships are not just a way to get a foot in the door but the only way to open the door at all. They have become a further compulsory step into many professions, but by their very nature they exclude many. We found that too often these placements are determined by existing connections. Be it a family or a business contact, the foot in the door is often available only to those who know someone on the other side of it.

Another area where we found the evidence remarkably consistent was in terms of the aspirations our young people have. They need role models, mentors and inspirers, people from their community who have been there and done it and who can say to them, "Yes you can be whatever you want to be." For too many, however, that is simply not on the radar.

The evidence I heard during the inquiry persuaded me that it is simply not enough for us to encourage companies to do more. We need to develop a culture in which social mobility is on a par with protected characteristics in terms of career prospects. We rightly challenge when we see minority sections of society not getting an equal opportunity, so we should do the same here. We cannot allow the situation to continue where background is likely to be the biggest factor in determining chances of success in life.

I would like the largest companies to publish data every year on how many people they have recruited from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, and, crucially, how those people have progressed within that company. We need a commonly agreed, publicly available record of how individual companies are doing. Only then will we see the big change in attitudes we need. Among advanced nations, the UK stands alongside the United States in having low social mobility. We need only to look across the Atlantic to see where ignoring these issues over successive generations leads. We should be in no doubt that we are heading the same way. I feel it when I speak to people in my constituency—the anger, the frustration, the hopelessness—who see the lack of opportunity around them and fear the same or worse for their children. Automation and artificial intelligence

are going to narrow the opportunity gap still further in the coming years. We need to act now before it is too late.

3.54 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): We have had a good debate this afternoon. It is clear that the Government's obsession with new grammar schools is simply a rehash of failed policies from the past—policies not fit for purpose in the digital age of the 21st century, as pointed out by my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) and for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk). As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) said, these proposals are pure dogma.

This grammar school policy shows that the Government have no answers to the challenges facing our schools. While they waste time and energy on new grammars, they have nothing to say about falling school budgets, the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention, and the lack of good school places. Instead, they would segregate our children: a first-class education for the privileged few, a second-class education for the rest. The hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) gave a passionate personal testimony about her father, who failed the 11-plus, while my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) explained, in an excellent speech, that policy should be designed for the tens of millions, not the few.

Mr Brady *rose*—

Mike Kane: I give way to my constituency neighbour.

Mr Brady: Will the hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to make it clear whether a future Labour Government would scrap existing grammar schools?

Mike Kane: I always like to debate with my constituency neighbour, and it was great to have him visit Sale Grammar School in my constituency just the other week. I regularly go to speak to the children there. The Government are currently nationalising and privatising the system at the same time. As the hon. Gentleman will remember from the debates in the mid-1990s, we would introduce a system of subsidiarity back into our education system, so it would be up to local people to decide; we would not have a nationalised system.

Chris Philp *rose*—

Mike Kane: I need to make progress. [*Interruption.*] I've answered the question.

Ministers have provided no evidence of how extra grammar schools will increase the social mobility of our young people—an issue more pronounced in the midlands and the north, as the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker) rightly pointed out. I could not agree more. Let me be clear: citing evidence about access to Russell Group universities is a complete red herring and a corrupt use of the statistics that fails to compare like with like. Let me provide some evidence instead, from the Government's own chief inspector. Sir Michael Wilshaw has said that in Hackney the attainment gap between those eligible for free school meals and their colleagues is 14%. In Kent, which

retains a selective system—I see the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) in her place—the gap is 34%. In Kent, just 27% of pupils eligible for free school meals get five good GCSEs, compared with 45% in London.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that “those in selective areas who don’t pass the 11-plus do worse than they would have done in a comprehensive system”.

Research by the Education Policy Institute has shown that, once the data are controlled for prior performance, grammar schools do not actually improve results, even for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The issue of grammar schools has divided the Conservative party. Many senior MPs have come out against the plans. The Minister is currently having to work with an ex-Minister who did not want it and now has to work with a Secretary of State who does want it but is under orders from the Prime Minister; and the former Education Secretary, who spoke eloquently, does not believe in it. My constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady), whom I have just debated with, needs to remember that Trafford has an excellent primary school system. I taught many of his children, I will have him know, which is why he has such good results in his constituency—and the primary system is not selective.

Turning to social mobility, my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) said that this will be the first generation since the second world war to be less well off than their parents. The Government have failed to build an education system that provides opportunity for all. Under this Government, the system is mediocre and falling behind, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) pointed out. They are increasingly obsessed with structures rather than with what matters most—the quality of education for our young people.

We have seen scandal after scandal in our multi-academy trusts, and the Government cannot get to grips with the structures they are putting in place. There is no governance—no effective governance—in the system, as the Department for Education creaks under the strain. The Government are not tackling the key challenges facing our schools system—declining budgets and chronic shortages of teachers and places. They have failed to invest in our young people at every stage of their education. Schools are facing their first real-term cuts since the '90s. Spending on further education has been cut time and again, while student debt continues to rise.

Government education policy has amounted to nothing more than a series of roadblocks to aspiration, opportunity and social mobility. The impact of those regressive policies is clear to all but the Government themselves. When Labour left office, 71% of state school students went on to university; last year, it fell to 62%, down from 66% the previous year. We Labour Members remain fully committed to ensuring that all our young people are given the opportunity to succeed on whatever educational path they choose, and that their opportunities are based only on what they aspire to—not on what they can afford. We will be fearless champions for every child, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) pointed out.

Figures published only last week by the National Association of Head Teachers showed that for the third consecutive year there is a real problem with recruitment

across all roles—from teachers to senior leaders. Overall, a very high proportion—80%—of posts were difficult to recruit, while 62% of posts were filled only with a struggle and respondents were unable to recruit at all to an average of 17% of all posts. Recruitment difficulties for the main middle leadership roles in schools are pronounced. For posts carrying a teaching and learning responsibility or special educational needs co-ordinator responsibility, only 17% of roles were filled with ease.

High housing and living costs remain a serious barrier to recruitment in London and the south-east, but the cost of living is becoming increasingly problematic nationally. There has been a 7% rise in school leaders citing this reason for the problems they face. Difficulties in recruitment this year have meant that 41% of responding schools have had to cover lessons with senior leadership staff, distracting from school improvement, while 70% have had to use supply teachers at high cost.

John Redwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mike Kane: I must make more progress.

I mentioned funding earlier. According to the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, England’s schools are experiencing, as I said, the largest real-terms funding cuts for more than a generation. In real terms, schools will lose a huge amount of money, rising to £2.5 billion by the year 2020, and 92% of schools will have their funding cut. The average cut for primary schools will be £96,500, going up to £290,000 for secondary schools. [*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State chunters from a sedentary position, but there is a website where she can see the figures for herself. Budgets were protected only in cash terms, rather than in real terms, meaning that the schools budget is at the mercy of rising pressures, pupil numbers and the impact of inflation. On top of the figures I have just given, schools are now worried about being further punished with the fair funding formula that the Government have yet to consult on. The Minister has refused to guarantee that no school will lose out. All this amounts to chaos and confusion.

I want to thank all those who have contributed to the debate. I have not agreed with all Members, including the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) and the hon. Members for Croydon South (Chris Philp), for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) and for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). I would like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and I also wish him a happy birthday, as I am sure the whole House does.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), and from the hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen). I am sure that the whole House will join me in wishing the hon. Gentleman’s family all the best following the loss of his father to mesothelioma: I was sorry to hear about it. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), and from the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), who always seems effectively to run down his own country. Finally, we heard from the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Corri Wilson) and the hon. Members for Newark (Robert Jenrick), for Southport (John Pugh), and for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng).

[Mike Kane]

We have a Government Front Bench team that requires special measures. We have a Government who are failing on selection, failing on social mobility, failing on the recruitment and retention of teachers, failing to provide enough good school places, and letting our future generation down badly.

4.5 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr Nick Gibb): Improving social mobility has been the driving force behind our reforms of the education system over the past six years. Thanks to those reforms, and the tireless work of hundreds of thousands of teachers, there are now 1.4 million more good or outstanding school places than there were in 2010.

The Government have given greater powers to teachers and heads to deal with disruptive behaviour. We have learnt from the successful Mathematics Mastery teaching methods of the far east. We created the Education Endowment Foundation to promote the use of evidence-based teaching practice. We have rewritten the curriculum at both primary and secondary levels to raise expectations of what children can achieve, and the focus on the Ebacc has halted the drift from the important core academic subjects—a drift that was particularly marked in areas of disadvantage. We have removed more than 3,000 so-called equivalent qualifications that too many children from disadvantaged backgrounds were being misled into taking instead of GCSEs.

We have improved the quality of technical qualifications, and have promoted and increased the importance and status of apprenticeships. There have been 624,000 apprenticeship starts since May 2015. We have revolutionised the teaching of reading in primary schools. Longitudinal studies have shown that systematic synthetic phonics give children a flying start with their reading, writing and spelling, and as a result 147,000 more year 1 pupils are on track to become fluent readers this year than in 2012.

However, despite improved teaching practice and a growing number of good school places, there are still too many parents who do not have the choice of a good school place for their child. In 65 local authority districts, fewer than 50% of pupils have a good or outstanding school within 5 km of their homes. As the Prime Minister reminded us on the steps of Downing Street,

“If you’re a white working-class boy, you’re less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university.”

According to a recent Sutton Trust report, white British boys on free school meals

“have now been either the lowest or second lowest performing ethnic group every year for a decade.”

It is because of that continued injustice that we are consulting on a range of measures to increase the number of good school places and serve communities that have yet to benefit fully from our education reforms. We want the education system to help build an even more meritocratic Britain, and we want to use the knowledge and expertise of this country’s world-leading universities and independent schools to benefit our school system. We want to remove the restrictive regulations that are preventing more children from going to high-quality faith schools, and we want to end the ban on the opening of new grammar schools.

As Philip Blond said when he introduced the recent ResPublica report on Knowsley,

“Reintroducing grammar schools is potentially a transformative idea for working-class areas”.

We know that grammar schools are vehicles of social mobility for the pupils who attend them, almost eliminating the attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers. Pupils in grammar schools make significantly more progress than similarly able pupils. Progress 8 shows an aggregate score of 0.33 for grammar schools, compared to a national average of 0. Ofsted has rated 99% of grammar school places good or better, and 82% outstanding. In a school system in which more than a million pupils are not being given the education that they need and deserve, it cannot be right to prevent the creation of more good and outstanding selective school places. As was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), the key is to make the alternative schools just as good, and that is what we are doing.

Nevertheless, we recognise that grammar schools can do more to promote social mobility. The Social Mobility Commission has said that young people are six times less likely to go to Oxbridge if they grow up in a poor household. In the north-east, not one child on free-school meals went to Oxbridge after leaving school in 2010. Yet of the state school pupils securing a place at Cambridge in 2015, 682 came from sixth-forms in comprehensive schools and 589 from grammar schools; in other words, almost as many come from the 163 grammar schools as come from all the 11-18 comprehensive schools put together. And we know that disadvantaged pupils from grammar schools are almost twice as likely to go to a top Russell Group university as those from more affluent comprehensive schools.

The Government are committed to ensuring this country works for everyone, not just a privileged few. With strict conditions applying to grammar schools, including ensuring more bright pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are admitted, we will boost social mobility in Britain. That objective was at the centre of excellent speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon South (Chris Philp), for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) and for Salisbury (John Glen)—and my condolences on the recent death of my hon. Friend’s father.

We also heard great speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), for Newark (Robert Jenrick) and for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng). But the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) let the cat out of the bag when she said the SNP’s view is not just against grammar schools, but against setting and streaming by ability within a school, not a view that lies within mainstream opinion, and which explains why attainment gaps have widened in Scotland.

I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), just as I learned to do in the two years when she was my boss at the Department for Education, and she is right that we have to tackle underperformance wherever it exists and ensure every child is being offered an academic, knowledge-rich curriculum. I can assure my right hon. Friend that we will take on board and take seriously representations made about the policies in the consultation documents, including those relating to selective education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) made the point in an intervention that it is about making the alternative schools just as good as the selective ones, a point also made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), who pointed out that grammar and comprehensive schools can coexist with both delivering a very high academic standard, as we see in his constituency.

Since 2010 more pupils have benefited from a core academic curriculum, increased numbers of pupils have a good or outstanding school place, and parents have a wider choice of the type of school for their children, but these opportunities have not yet been spread widely enough. We want to create a meritocracy where every child has access to the education that will take them as far as their talents allow. That is why our consultation document “Schools that work for everyone” is looking at every possible way to provide new good schools, particularly in areas serving the 1.25 million pupils in schools that need to improve.

I worry about those 1.25 million pupils; for them the time is now, which is why we need to do even more than we have been doing over the past six years to improve educational standards for them. I worry about the Social Mobility Commission finding that not one pupil eligible for free school meals in the north-east went to Oxbridge in 2010. I worry about the so-called missing talent—highly able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who leave primary school with standard assessment tests results way above the average but who achieve significantly less well than similarly able but more advantaged pupils. Nationally, 78% of level 5 pupils go on to achieve the EBacc, but for level 5 pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds that figure is just 52%.

So I say to the Labour party, “You should worry too. You should be as concerned as we are. You should be looking at every option. You should be asking how we spread the excellence we see in outstanding schools to every part of the country. You should be more concerned about the education these children are receiving than the virtue-signalling that lies at the root of what the Opposition do and say.”

If Opposition Members really care, they will look at the proposals in the consultation document and take seriously the suggestions on how to eradicate inadequate school provision wherever it exists. We will take seriously the responses to that consultation. We will listen to people’s views and understand their concerns, but we will do so on the clear understanding that our joint endeavour is to promote social mobility and ensure that a child’s one chance of an education is not sacrificed on the altar of political posturing.

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

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 310.

Division No. 94]

[4.14 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Ashworth, Jonathan
Abrahams, Debbie	Austin, Ian
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Alexander, Heidi	Beckett, rh Margaret
Ali, Rushanara	Benn, rh Hilary
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Betts, Mr Clive
Arkless, Richard	Black, Mhairi

Blackford, Ian	Flynn, Paul
Blackman, Kirsty	Fovargue, Yvonne
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Foxcroft, Vicky
Blenkinsop, Tom	Furniss, Gill
Blomfield, Paul	Gapes, Mike
Boswell, Philip	Gardiner, Barry
Brabin, Tracy	Gethins, Stephen
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Gibson, Patricia
Brake, rh Tom	Glass, Pat
Brennan, Kevin	Glindon, Mary
Brock, Deidre	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Brown, Alan	Goodman, Helen
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Grady, Patrick
Bryant, Chris	Grant, Peter
Buck, Ms Karen	Gray, Neil
Burgon, Richard	Green, Kate
Burnham, rh Andy	Greenwood, Margaret
Butler, Dawn	Griffith, Nia
Byrne, rh Liam	Gwynne, Andrew
Cadbury, Ruth	Haigh, Louise
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Hamilton, Fabian
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Hanson, rh Mr David
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Champion, Sarah	Harris, Carolyn
Chapman, Douglas	Hayes, Helen
Chapman, Jenny	Healey, rh John
Cherry, Joanna	Hendrick, Mr Mark
Clegg, rh Mr Nick	Hendry, Drew
Coffey, Ann	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Cooper, Julie	Hillier, Meg
Cooper, Rosie	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hollern, Kate
Cowan, Ronnie	Hopkins, Kelvin
Crausby, Mr David	Hosie, Stewart
Crawley, Angela	Howarth, rh Mr George
Creasy, Stella	Hunt, Tristram
Cruddas, Jon	Huq, Dr Rupa
Cryer, John	Hussain, Imran
Cunningham, Alex	Johnson, rh Alan
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Johnson, Diana
Dakin, Nic	Jones, Gerald
Danczuk, Simon	Jones, Graham
David, Wayne	Jones, Helen
Davies, Geraint	Jones, Mr Kevan
Day, Martyn	Jones, Susan Elan
De Piero, Gloria	Kane, Mike
Debonnaire, Thangam	Keeley, Barbara
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Kendall, Liz
Donaldson, Stuart Blair	Kerevan, George
Doughty, Stephen	Kerr, Calum
Dowd, Jim	Kinnock, Stephen
Dowd, Peter	Kyle, Peter
Dromey, Jack	Lavery, Ian
Dugher, Michael	Law, Chris
Durkan, Mark	Leslie, Chris
Eagle, Ms Angela	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Eagle, Maria	Lewis, Mr Ivan
Edwards, Jonathan	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Efford, Clive	Lucas, Caroline
Elliott, Julie	Lucas, Ian C.
Ellman, Mrs Louise	Lynch, Holly
Elmore, Chris	MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Esterson, Bill	Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Evans, Chris	Madders, Justin
Farrelly, Paul	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Ferrier, Margaret	Mahmood, Shabana
Field, rh Frank	Malhotra, Seema
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Mann, John
Flello, Robert	Marris, Rob
Fletcher, Colleen	Marsden, Gordon
Flint, rh Caroline	Maskell, Rachael

Matheson, Christian
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz

Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Judith Cummins and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen

Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter

Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus

Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Gummer, rh Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy

Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew

Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark

Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward

Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggan, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Steve Brine and
Andrew Griffiths

Question accordingly negatived.

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

Question agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House believes that every child throughout the UK must be given the opportunity to reach their full potential; shares the strong commitment of this Government to promoting and improving social mobility and building a country that works for everyone; notes that there are now more than 1.4 million pupils in England attending good or outstanding schools than in 2010; and welcomes the opportunity afforded by the Schools that Work for Everyone consultation to seek the widest possible range of views on how the Government can build upon these successes and awaits the outcome of the current consultation.

National Health Service Funding

[*Relevant documents: Letter from the Chair and members of the Health Committee to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, dated 26 October 2016, and the Chancellor's response, dated 8 November 2016.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I advise the House that Mr Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.29 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern that the deficit in the budgets of NHS trusts and foundation trusts in England at the end of the 2015-16 financial year was £2.45 billion; further notes that members of the Health Committee wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about their concerns that Government assertions on NHS funding were incorrect and risked giving a false impression; and calls on the Government to use the Autumn Statement to address the underfunding of the NHS and guarantee sustainable financing of the NHS.

I begin by reminding the House that, six years ago, the then Conservative leader promised to “cut the deficit and not the NHS.”

The previous Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), told us that he would “properly fund public services” and that

“investment in public services would come before tax cuts.”—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2006; Vol. 453, c. 837.]

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Jonathan Ashworth: Oh, go on then.

Robert Ffello: My hon. Friend is most generous. He might have missed something. Did the Chancellor not say that he would wipe out the deficit by 2015?

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend is eagle-eyed, and I congratulate him on reminding us that the Government should have balanced the books by 2015, and that they completely failed on that pledge.

Then the new Prime Minister made this promise:

“We will be looking to ensure that we provide the health service that is right for everyone in this country.”—[*Official Report*, 7 September 2016; Vol. 614, c. 333.]

Fine words, but it is by their deeds that they shall be known. What did we actually get? An NHS that is going through the largest financial squeeze in its history. Far from protecting the NHS through the years of this Tory Government, NHS spending will represent an average annual increase of just 0.9%—a decade of barely any increase in spending despite an ageing population with increasingly complex needs.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con) rose—

Jonathan Ashworth: I will give way in a few moments.

By 2017, NHS spending per head will level out, and, head for head, by 2018 NHS spending will be falling under this Conservative Government. Trusts ended last year in deficit for the second year running—they were

£2.45 billion in deficit and they are reported to be heading for a deficit of around £670 million at the end of this financial year.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Is this the explanation for the secret plan in County Durham to cut the number of beds for frail elderly people by 20%?

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I will be coming on to those secret plans as I develop my speech.

We will be spending less on the NHS as a proportion of GDP than our European neighbours such as Germany, France and the Netherlands. The NHS maintenance budgets have been repeatedly raided, with billions that had been allocated to capital routinely being switched to revenue to plug gaps.

David T. C. Davies rose—

Jonathan Ashworth: I will give way in a moment.

The maintenance situation has got so bad that the NHS faces a backlog of £5 billion in repairs.

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way.

Jonathan Ashworth: I will give way in a moment. The former Education Secretary needs to calm down, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Public health budgets, which fund projects to tackle teenage pregnancy, excessive alcohol consumption, sexually transmitted infections and substance misuse and to provide anti-smoking interventions, will have been cut by 9.7% by the end of this Parliament. That is a completely false economy leading to greater demands on the acute sector. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) so brilliantly outlined last week, the adult social care budget has been slashed.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con) rose—

Jonathan Ashworth: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Sir Simon Burns: I am so grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The House would take him somewhat more seriously if he pointed out that, by 2019-20, the real-terms increase in spending on the health service will be £10 billion. During the last election, his party promised to increase spending in this Parliament by only a quarter of that—£2.5 billion.

Jonathan Ashworth: The right hon. Gentleman was the Minister who took the Health and Social Care Act 2012 through this Parliament, and who wasted £3 billion on an unnecessary top-down reorganisation. He should be apologising to the House, not making those comments.

Several hon. Members rose—

Jonathan Ashworth: No, I want to make a bit of progress.

We are seeing unprecedented cuts to social care, which means that the number of people aged over 65 accessing publicly funded social care will fall by 26%.

UK public spending on social care is set to fall to less than 1% of GDP by the end of this Parliament.

Just yesterday, Baroness Altmann, the former Conservative pensions Minister who was appointed last year to great fanfare by David Cameron, said that we are “sleepwalking into a crisis” and that the NHS will not be able to pick up the pieces of a “broken system”.

Sir Simon Burns *rose*—

Jonathan Ashworth: I have given way to the right hon. Gentleman. [*Interruption.*] He can check *Hansard* tomorrow.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that when funding is cut, our hospitals seek to raise cash in other ways, such as the unacceptable level of car parking charges at our hospitals—charges which the Government promised before the last election to clamp down on?

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend is running a brilliant campaign on that. I hope that when the Minister responds, he will reply to that point.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jonathan Ashworth: I shall make a little progress because many other Members want to speak and I want to give them a chance.

The scale of the financial pressures engulfing the NHS are such that the chief executive of NHS Providers, Chris Hopson, said recently:

“The gap between what the NHS is being asked to deliver and the funding it has available is too big and is growing rapidly.”

The King’s Fund said, with respect to the NHS deficit, that

“it signifies a health system buckling under the strain of huge financial and operational pressures.”

In the most damning assessment of the Government’s handling of the NHS, the National Audit Office concluded today that financial problems in the NHS

“are endemic and this is not sustainable.”

Even the former Health Secretary, Andrew Lansley, said that

“in 2010 we knew we had to implement a tight budget squeeze for five years, but we never thought it would last for ten.”

David T. C. Davies: Surely the hon. Gentleman has seen the report from the Nuffield Trust on the four health systems of the United Kingdom, which shows very clearly that there is only one part of the United Kingdom that has seen a real-terms cut in NHS expenditure, and that is Wales under a Labour Government.

Jonathan Ashworth: There will be a cash injection in Wales in 2017, whereas spending per head in the English NHS will be levelling out and then falling in 2018.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): In Enfield we are short of 84 GPs going forward and we have just had a hospital crisis at the North Middlesex hospital, where there were not enough doctors for our A&E to be safe

for patients, yet the only thing we hear about is the sustainability and transformation plan locally which, as far as we can see, is not only secret but about taking £22 billion out of the NHS.

Jonathan Ashworth: My right hon. Friend is right and she is a brilliant campaigner for the health service in Enfield. The points that she makes about the staffing crisis in the NHS are well made. I hope that the Secretary of State will respond to her.

Things are so bad for the Health Secretary that even the NHS chief executive told the Health Committee that

“2018-19 will be the most pressurised year for us...will have negative per-person NHS funding growth.”

Those were the chief executive’s words. Will the Health Secretary sit up and listen, and respond to the chief executive, or will we get what we saw in the Sunday newspapers—briefing against him. We heard that the Government are “gunning for” Mr Stevens and are going to “fix” him. I hope the Secretary of State will repudiate that briefing when he responds to the debate and distance himself from it.

The only people who do not appear to accept the need for more money for the NHS are the Prime Minister and Secretary of State. We anticipate what the Secretary of State will tell us from the Dispatch Box. The right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) alluded to it and I will now answer his question. The Secretary of State will not only tell us that we have a generous, munificent Conservative Government who have given the NHS the money it asked for, but persist with the fiction that the NHS is receiving an extra £10 billion. However, we all know—and I suspect that the Secretary of State knows, because he now distances himself from the figure when he does interviews—thanks to the Health Committee and others that this £10 billion claim is bogus. It is a claim universally derided and discredited, apart from in the drawing room of 10 Downing Street.

Michael Gove *rose*—

Jonathan Ashworth: It will be a pleasure to give way to the former Education Secretary.

Michael Gove: The chief executive of the NHS, whom the hon. Gentleman has just mentioned, welcomed that additional £10 billion and said that it gives the NHS the extra headroom we need. Will the hon. Gentleman repudiate his criticism now and make it clear that he associates himself with the chief executive of the NHS in welcoming that £10 billion of extra funding?

Jonathan Ashworth: The chief executive’s comments to the Select Committee speak for themselves. Talking of repudiation, when are we going to get £350 million a week, or were the Tories typically saying one thing before the people voted and something completely different after they had had their say? That is what the ex-Education Secretary should be telling us.

Let me remind the House what the Health Committee said. I see the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) in her place, and she said:

“The continued use of the figure of £10 billion for the additional health spending up to 2020-21 is not only incorrect but risks giving a false impression that the NHS is awash with cash.”

[Jonathan Ashworth]

She is sitting only a little further down from the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). Perhaps he can have a word with her if he disagrees.

The Secretary of State hopes we do not notice that he is stretching the timeframe over which he presents this funding allocation. He hopes we do not notice that NHS spending has been redefined by the most recent spending review. He hopes we do not spot that he is cutting billions from public health budgets and other Department of Health funding streams—a £3 billion cut. But we have noticed.

Mr Jackson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jonathan Ashworth: In a few moments.

We have spotted the Secretary of State's conjuring act because we have seen this Tory trick before—robbing Peter to pay Paul. The result of this trick is cuts and underfunding, more pressures flowing through to the frontline, and, as the NAO said,

“Financial stress...harming patient care”.

In all our constituencies we see ever-lengthening queues of the elderly and the sick waiting for treatment. Across the board, we see the worst performance data since records began.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Nonsense.

Jonathan Ashworth: What world is the Secretary of State living in? Half a million patients have waited for four hours or more in A&E in the past three months—the worst performance for this time of year for more than a decade—and he says it is nonsense. Some 350,000 of our constituents are waiting longer than the promised time for elective treatment—some have been waiting more than a year—and he says it is nonsense. Delayed discharges from hospitals are at record levels, and he says it is nonsense. The number of people waiting for 12 hours or more on trolleys has increased by over 700% since 2011-12.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House why it is that, after 12 minutes, he has yet to praise all our hard-working doctors, nurses and other health professionals? Why is he constantly talking down our great NHS, including the hospitals in Leicester?

Jonathan Ashworth: I praise the hard-working staff in the NHS every day of the week, but I rather suspect that staff in the NHS will have more sympathy with the position I am outlining than with the right hon. Lady's position, not least when, according to surveys, 88% of NHS staff think that the NHS is under the most pressure they can remember, and 77% think that there is less access to resources, putting the quality of patient care and clinical standards at risk. That, I say to her, is what NHS staff are saying.

Mr Jackson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jonathan Ashworth: Oh, okay.

Mr Jackson: Perhaps I can just allow the hon. Gentleman to break off from reading his press release. I think we are moving towards a consensus on this issue, in that we

do need to integrate acute clinical care and adult social care, and I understand that. In that vein, why was it that, in 13 years, when there was significant demographic change, the Labour Government failed to bring forward a better care fund or a precept for social care?

Jonathan Ashworth: It beggars belief! We tripled investment in the NHS, and the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends voted against every penny piece. When we left office, we had the best waiting times and the highest satisfaction levels on record. That is the difference between a Labour Government and a Conservative Government on the NHS.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Can the hon. Gentleman explain, then, why the Labour Government closed the maternity and accident and emergency departments at Crawley hospital?

Jonathan Ashworth: Well, reconfigurations are always going ahead. [Interruption.] If Conservative Members are so concerned, I look forward to the hon. Gentleman campaigning against the STPs for his area, when they are published in a few weeks.

Several hon. Members rose—

Jonathan Ashworth: I am going to make a bit of progress, because I am aware that Members want to speak.

We have seen what the reality of six years of Tory underfunding and cuts in our NHS are all about, and there are more stealth cuts to come, which will add further pressures. For example—these are small things, but they all add up—cuts to the Care Quality Commission mean that it will increase its fees for NHS hospitals, other trusts and other providers. Some trusts will have to pay over £100,000 as a result of these cuts. Reductions in education and training tariffs will put more pressures on trusts and on the frontline. In the House the other week, we debated how cuts to community pharmacies will lead to increased demands on the NHS.

Only last week, news slipped out about the privatisation of NHS Professionals. A body that makes a profit for the NHS and ploughs that back into the NHS is going to be privatised, and that profit will presumably go to private companies.

The combination of all these cuts and privatisations, the utter failure to deal with the crisis in adult social care, and the lack of planning for an ageing population with complex needs will directly lead to greater demands on the NHS, bigger cuts, and deficits across the board. It is in this context that the NHS is also expected to find £22 billion of so-called efficiencies and to redesign services across England completely as part of the sustainability and transformation process.

Where sustainability and transformation plans are about transforming services in the interests of patient care, reversing fragmentation and ensuring more collaboration in geographical areas, we will consider them carefully. We will want to look at every single STP to see whether those plans are genuinely jointly owned, and whether they tackle the crisis in social care, guarantee better access to care for the long term, and are transparent and financially viable. What we know so far, though, is far from reassuring, because we can see from the 19 or

so STPs that have been published that the ground has shifted. It has become obvious that what began as a project to transform services for patients and build up community services is now more about closing the financial gap:

“Of course, the driving force behind STPs is the emergence in the last two financial years of substantial deficits.”

Those are not my words, but those of Andrew Lansley just a few weeks ago. The STP areas that we have seen so far have been racking up shortfalls of about £10 billion that can be filled only by cuts to hundreds of beds, closing hospitals, downgrading A&Es, downgrading maternity wings and withdrawing treatments.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that proposals to downgrade A&E in an area such as Warrington, which is surrounded by motorways as well as containing many people who suffer from health deprivation, is a recipe for disaster? If people have to travel further for emergency care, that will not improve their care in any way.

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend is extremely knowledgeable about the health service and has been campaigning vigorously on the STPs. She is completely right. We will see hospitals merged in the Merseyside area and in London, hospitals lost in Durham, and efficiencies found by changing staffing levels. In fact, the STP for Cheshire and Merseyside, the area that she represents, talks enticingly of

“Exploration of a Factory Model”.

Doesn't that sound nice?

With cuts to services and rock-bottom staff morale, we have the Sports Direct approach to the NHS, with the Secretary of State playing the part of Mike Ashley. The public deserve better than this bargain basement approach. Scaling back the acute sector while not investing in the community sector simply does not work. The Prime Minister might have ruled out extra funding—

Michael Gove: I have listened with great interest to the hon. Gentleman. He has spoken eloquently of his concerns about the NHS, but has not, in the course of 18 minutes, put forward a single positive policy or explained where a single penny of additional funding would come from. He has secured the time for this debate, so would he at least put forward a positive policy for the NHS, or a suggestion as to where the money should come from?

Jonathan Ashworth: The right hon. Gentleman really does have a brass neck. We still do not know when we are going to get the £350 million from him, but next time he intervenes perhaps he will tell us.

Michael Gove: Answer the question.

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab) *rose—*

Jonathan Ashworth: I give way to my hon. Friend. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. That is enough shouting.

Rosie Cooper: Perhaps the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) would like to tell me how cutting the A&E at Southport and Ormskirk hospital and giving local community and acute services to Virgin Care can be a positive story for the NHS.

Jonathan Ashworth: This is exactly the sort of point that we are making; my hon. Friend is absolutely correct. That is why we need to look carefully at all these STPs. Of course, we do not know much about them at the moment, because all we see is glossy brochures that tell us that everything is going to be all right and not to worry. We want transparency. The Secretary of State should insist that every single STP is published and that we have the details of the cuts that will be made in our communities.

Dame Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab) *rose—*

Jonathan Ashworth: I give way to my right hon. Friend the former Chief Whip.

Dame Rosie Winterton: Is not one of the problems with local planning the recruitment of GPs and the lack of GPs locally? Would it not help if we were to amend the Health and Social Care Act 2012 so that clinical commissioning groups and NHS England could provide directly salaried GPs instead of being prevented from being doing so, as is the case at the moment? That is a practical example of something that would save money and increase the local provision of GP services.

Jonathan Ashworth: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Morale among GPs is at an all-time low. She identifies another problem that has emerged because of the 2012 Act. I hope that the Minister will respond to her important point.

Helen Jones *rose—*

Jonathan Ashworth: I will give way to my hon. Friend, but then I will not take any more interventions.

Helen Jones: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Cheshire and Merseyside group has not only refused to publish details about the STP, but refused my Freedom of Information Act request for information about the meetings that were held on the STP and who was present at them? Does that not simply give rise to suspicion that this whole process is being driven by cuts rather than the need to improve care?

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will now make a bit of progress because I know that other Members are anxious to speak.

The Chancellor should respond tomorrow to the growing body of evidence that the NHS has not been given the money that it needs. Tomorrow, we need an end to the scandal of crumbling hospitals. Tomorrow, the Chancellor must put right the Government's greatest betrayal on adult social care. Tomorrow, the Government must deliver the long-overdue investment that our NHS needs.

Michael Gove: Where is the money coming from?

Jonathan Ashworth: What sense does it make to carry on cutting inheritance tax, capital gains tax and corporation tax, at a cost of billions to the Exchequer, while at the same time failing to fund our national health service or to give social care the money it demands? The Prime Minister lets the CBI know that she is prepared to give away billions extra in corporation tax, but she tells us that there is no more money for the NHS. The Chancellor will be prevented from acting tomorrow not by financial constraints, but by the ideological constraints that the Government have placed on themselves. It is time to give the NHS the funding that it needs. I commend the motion to the House.

4.52 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “House” to the end of the Question and add

“welcomes the Government’s investment, on the back of a strong economy, of significant additional funding and resources each year for the NHS during the 2015 Parliament; notes that this settlement was frontloaded at the specific request of the NHS in NHS England’s own plan to deliver an improved and more sustainable service, the Five Year Forward View; and further notes that the NHS will receive a real terms increase in funding in each year of the Spending Review period, while the Labour Party’s Manifesto at the last election committed to only an extra £2.5 billion a year by 2020, far less than the NHS requested.”.

As I did in last week’s debate on social care, I want to start by recognising the fantastic work done by NHS staff up and down the country. This autumn, I met a mental health nurse who told me how she had had to cope with the pressure of one of her patients throwing himself off a bridge the day after a consultation. I am sure that all Members have stories of the incredible dedication of NHS staff—not just people doing their jobs, but people putting their heart and soul into their work, staying late, going the extra mile, and sacrificing home time and holidays to be there for patients. As I did last week, I also want to recognise the 50,000 NHS staff from EU countries, including 26,000 low-paid staff, who do a brilliant job. Today we have heard concerns about funding, A&E—

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr Hunt: I will give way in a moment, but I just want to finish this sentence, if I may.

We have heard concerns about funding, A&E performance, waiting times and morale, and I want to answer them all. There are many pressures in the NHS, but I also want to recognise some successes, because one of the things that is most damaging to morale is not giving credit where it is due.

Paul Farrelly: Can the Secretary of State explain why he has made scores of redundancies in north Staffordshire? In my 15 years as an MP, I have never seen the local NHS in such a meltdown, with a scorched-earth policy of cuts and closures, and more to come with next year’s still-secret STP. When will the Government realise that pressures on social care and the NHS are such that those services are unsustainable without decent further funding and investment?

Mr Hunt: As the hon. Gentleman knows, those things would certainly be unsustainable if we had followed the Labour party’s investment plans at the time of the

previous general election. If he wants to know what is happening to staff, let me tell him that in the period I have been Health Secretary, we have got 5,000 more doctors and 10,000 more nurses. That is what happens when we have a Government who are prepared to invest in the NHS.

The shadow Health Secretary talked about A&E—he is right to say that we are not hitting the target, and we are doing something about that—but he did not tell the House that, since Labour left office, we have recruited 1,200 more doctors for A&E departments, which is a 25% increase, including a more than 50% increase for consultants. Every day, we are seeing 2,500 more people within four hours.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Hunt: I give way, with pleasure, to a junior doctor.

Dr Allin-Khan: I am a junior doctor in A&E, of which the right hon. Gentleman speaks, and I can say that morale is at an absolute all-time low. We have a recruitment and retention crisis in A&E. We are losing all the fantastic staff whom we have been able to recruit because this Government are not recognising and accepting the fantastic workforce on our A&E frontline. All the doctors are leaving.

Mr Hunt: With respect, the hon. Lady might be on the wrong side of the House, because I started my speech by recognising the brilliant work done by doctors and nurses, something that the shadow Health Secretary conspicuously failed to do. Let us look at her own hospital: since 2010, St George’s has—*[Interruption.]* I do not know whether she is interested in hearing my response to her intervention. Since 2010, her hospital has had 884 more nurses and 240 more doctors, and her CCG had a £10 million funding increase this year.

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me to speak again. I shall refer at length to St George’s hospital in my speech, but it is very unfair of him to bring it into this debate. It is because of this Government that St George’s hospital is operating at a £50 million deficit. It is because of this Government that we are now in special measures. It is—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. The hon. Lady is hoping to catch the eye of the Chair later in the debate. As it is, there will be a five or four-minute time limit, so Members who intervene must do so very briefly and not very frequently. If they do not do so, I am afraid that they may not be called to speak.

Mr Hunt: The shadow Health Secretary also did not talk about cancer. In 2010, we had the lowest cancer survival rates in western Europe. Since then, we have referred for cancer tests 2,200 more people every day, and 100 more people are starting cancer treatment every day. The cancer charities say that this is saving 12,000 lives a year. On mental health, he did not mention the fact that we are treating 1,400 more people every day, with record dementia diagnosis rates.

Mr Jackson: Would not Opposition Members be a little more straightforward and honest about the wider context if they admitted the demographic challenge

that this Government face, as they would have faced? The number of over-60s will increase by 50% in the next 15 years. Should they not also admit that the private finance initiative was an appalling millstone—£64 billion—to bequeath to this Government? That has had an impact on front-line care.

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that point. People will be astonished to hear Labour Members wasting their time talking about a privatisation of the NHS that is not happening when they were responsible for PFI, the worst possible privatisation that has done such enormous damage.

Another point that the shadow Health Secretary did not mention was the quality and safety of care in our NHS that Labour left behind. The Francis report revealed massive problems—short staffing; a culture of denial and cover-ups—and they were not just at Mid Staffs but, as we now know, at Basildon, Morecambe Bay and many other trusts. Since we have been in office we have changed that. We have put 31 hospitals into special measures, which is more than 10% of hospitals across the entire NHS, and we have recruited record numbers of doctors and nurses.

I want to tell the House about one hospital that was put into special measures. Care was unsafe at Wexham Park in Slough—so much so that fewer than half the hospital staff were prepared to recommend the care provided there to their own friends and family—but it has gone from having six of its eight clinical areas rated as requiring improvement or inadequate, to having all eight of them rated as good or outstanding. It has come out of special measures, as have 15 hospitals in total, and we should all commend the staff who have worked incredibly hard to turn around those hospitals.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman has the nerve to talk about the inheritance from a previous Administration, when what we inherited in 1997 was people dying on waiting lists of more than 18 months for heart operations.

Mr Hunt: I have often from this Dispatch Box been prepared to praise some of the achievements of the last Labour Government. They did bring down waiting times, but they did not focus on the quality and safety of care.

What we now know from the CQC's new regime, which has just finished its first round of inspections, is that 56% of our hospitals are good or outstanding. One could say that it is disappointing to know that 44% of hospitals are not, but to those who would use that as a political weapon I say this: we are the only country in the world brave enough to set up an independent inspection regime, and if we want to have the safest, highest quality care, the first thing we need to know is where it is good and where we need to improve it. I thank the chief inspector of hospitals, Professor Sir Mike Richards, for his outstanding work in raising quality.

Joan Ryan: The right hon. Gentleman talks about the inspection regime, but I think I am right in saying that it was not something he and his Government introduced. The Care Quality Commission was introduced by a Labour Government, as far as I am aware. As I know from North Middlesex hospital, hospitals end up in special measures because they are underfunded and under-supported, and cannot get the doctors they need.

Mr Hunt: The right hon. Lady is right that the Care Quality Commission was set up by the last Labour Government, but it did not have independence from the Government in its inspection reports. When we legislated for that, Labour tried to vote it down. We got it through and changed the inspection system, and it is working extremely well.

I want to move on to the substance of the debate, which is about the funding of the NHS. I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) on his courage—indeed, his chutzpah—in confronting the issue of funding, despite inheriting a Labour policy to cut NHS funding by £5.5 billion a year by the end of the Parliament. He is right that there has never been greater financial pressure—we have had the financial crisis in 2008, the deficits and the growth in demand from the ageing population—but he must accept that that makes it all the more extraordinary that Labour wanted to cut the NHS budget in 2010 and to cut it from the current levels in 2015. I simply say that we could, as a Government, have chosen to cut NHS funding from this year's level by £1.3 billion, as under Labour's plans, but we would have had to lay off 11,000 doctors or 40,000 nurses.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): The problem with the Conservatives' script is that they talk about NHS funding, but they completely neglect social care. There can be no debate about the fact they have cut social care every year for the last six years, taking support away from half a million older people, many of whom are now trapped in hospital beds. Greater Manchester says that it has a shortfall of about £80 million in social care; the figure is £1 billion nationally. Has the Secretary of State raised this issue with the Chancellor? Has he made an emergency bid for funding? Will there be more money for social care this year?

Mr Hunt: That is not the problem with our script; it is the problem with the right hon. Gentleman's script, because as shadow Health Secretary he sanctioned a policy that would have given the NHS £1.3 billion less this year, and at the last election the then shadow Chancellor said he would give not a penny more to local authorities, whereas we are seeing social care funding go up by £600 million this year. More money is going into the NHS and the social care system under a Government who are committed to funding them both.

What is especially wrong with the argument made by the shadow Health Secretary, whom I welcome to his place for his first Opposition day debate, is his suggestion that the Government have not honoured their promises to the NHS. What did the independent commentators say at the time of last year's spending review? Simon Stevens, whom he quoted, said

“our case for the NHS has been heard and actively supported.”

NHS Providers, which he quoted, said it was

“a good settlement for the NHS.”

The King's Fund, which he quoted, said it was

“a good settlement for the NHS”.

In fact, because of the Government's commitment to the NHS, we are spending 10% more on it as a proportion of GDP than the OECD average—that is more than Norway, Finland, Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

Sir Simon Burns: Does my right hon. Friend agree that without that investment since 2009-10 to last year there would not have been the 1.6 million more operations within the NHS that benefit all our constituents?

Mr Hunt: My right hon. Friend is right. I congratulate him, because he was part of the shadow Health team that persuaded the then shadow Chancellor and Leader of the Opposition that we needed to make that investment, thanks to which the NHS is doing 5,000 more operations every single day.

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend has been very gracious in taking interventions from all sides, and also in citing independent voices. Has not the independent King's Fund also pointed out that the sustainability and transformation plans that he is overseeing are the "best hope" of securing long-term improvement for both health and care in this country? Does he agree that the Opposition should pay rather more attention to those independent experts, rather than repeating their own press releases?

Mr Hunt: My right hon. Friend is right that just occasionally we should listen to experts—but only very occasionally. In the spirit of listening to experts, and as the Leader of the Opposition is here, I will tell my right hon. Friend something else the King's Fund has said that he will agree with, which is that

"claims of mass privatisation were and are exaggerated."

Let us not go chasing down rabbit holes.

The result of this Government's commitment to the NHS is that real-terms spending per head has gone up by 4.6%, which is double the rate in Scotland and three times the rate in Wales. The hon. Member for Leicester South also mentioned the National Audit Office. He did not mention that the numbers quoted in the NAO report are last year's figures. He chose not to mention this year's numbers, which were published last week. They show that 40 fewer trusts are in deficit. Yes, a year ago, half of trusts were missing their financial plans, but now 86% are hitting those plans.

The latest figures, from Friday, show that the deficit will fall 73% from last year, and even lower than the year before. Why is that? It is because of a sustained effort by the NHS to tackle the problem. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition do not want to hear this, but the truth is that the NHS is gripping the very problem the shadow Health Secretary called a debate on. Agency spend, one of the biggest challenges, is on track to go down from £3.7 billion to less than £3 billion. The rates paid for agency nurses are down 18% on a year ago, and for locum doctors they are down 13%. Our procurement changes are on track to save half a billion pounds. The money we raise from international visitors is up three times, from £84 million to £289 million.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): It is important that we focus not just on the level of spending but on where we spend the money. With long-term conditions such as diabetes, is it not essential to focus on preventive work, which in the long term will save the national health service a huge amount of money?

Mr Hunt: That is absolutely right. In all frankness, that argument could have been made from the Opposition Front Bench this afternoon, and we would be having a much better debate.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the calm and dignified way he is dealing with this debate, as compared with the Opposition. May I put in a plug for local community hospitals, not just in my constituency but right across the country, and how vital their retention is for good quality care in the future?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend, who himself personifies calm and dignity. Community hospitals are indeed extremely important. Their role may change, but they will none the less continue to be a vital part of provision in most of our constituencies.

Helen Goodman: Since the Secretary of State thinks community hospitals are so important, will he guarantee that the Richardson in Barnard Castle will stay open?

Mr Hunt: I think the hon. Lady will be happy to know that such decisions are made not by Health Secretaries of either party but locally.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Hunt: I will make some progress, but I will find time to give way to hon. Friends who I know want to come in.

I want to pick up on a particularly extraordinary comment made yesterday by the shadow Health Secretary. He said:

"aggressive efficiency targets have contributed to deficits".

That is a curious thing to say, first because his own spending plans would have meant £5.5 billion more efficiencies. If he thinks our plans are aggressive, I just wonder how he would describe Labour's approach. Secondly, I know we are all Corbynistas now, but basic economics suggests that efficiency plans do not increase deficits, but reduce deficits. That is what we need to do in the NHS, because we want the money to go to patient care.

There is another danger in the shadow Health Secretary's argument, a trap that is very easy not just for him but for many commentators to fall into: the suggestion that this is a uniform problem across the NHS that it is powerless to grip without further Government intervention. The reality is that there is huge variation across the system. The deficits at good or outstanding trusts are five times less than the deficits at other trusts. If all trusts had the same financial performance as the good or outstanding ones, we would have a surplus of nearly half a billion pounds. Half the deficits are from just 22 trusts. We see this variation on a very specific level. For example, the amount paid for a pair of surgical gloves, which are very important to all hospitals, is £1.27 in some hospitals and just 50p in others. As for waiting lists, of 1,000 people who are waiting more than a year for their treatment, which is unacceptable, there is just one person from an outstanding trust who has been waiting that long. Some 93% are from trusts that require improvement or are inadequate. This is why we have a huge programme to support and improve those trusts and deal with the challenges they face.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): On financial management, does the Secretary of State recognise that in Labour-run Wales agency staff spend has increased

60% in the past year? That compares with the tough measures taken in England to crack down on wasteful spending.

Mr Hunt: I do recognise that. It has been going up in Scotland as well. It is short-sighted of both Administrations not to work with us to tackle the problem; otherwise, staff living in border areas play off one system against the other.

Andy Burnham: The Secretary of State is trying to blame hospitals for the deficit, but the point is that the spend on agency staff has ballooned in England over the past six years. The reason is that the Government, and their predecessor, cut nurse training places and left hospitals in the grip of private staffing agencies. It is therefore simply not fair of the Secretary of State to stand at the Dispatch Box and blame hospitals for a problem of the Government's making.

Mr Hunt: I am not blaming hospitals. We are supporting hospitals to deal with the problem. The root cause of the problem, set out in the Francis report, was hospitals covering up bad problems. We said no to that and said that we were going to sort it out by having more nurses on our wards. That is why, in the four years that I have been Health Secretary, we have had 10,000 more nurses on our wards.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the public are finally starting to see through the usual Labour smokescreen that is high on rhetoric and low on alternative solutions, with very patchy and poor delivery when Labour is given the chance? My right hon. Friend's approach to the health service—a quiet delivery of change and proper funding—is what the public are looking for.

Mr Hunt: It is noticeable that the two potential solutions we have heard have been from Opposition Back Benchers—the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) and the former shadow Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton)—and not from the Opposition Front Bench. My hon. Friend makes an important point.

The shadow Health Secretary is right to hold the Government to account for the funding of the NHS and the social care system, but it is a big mistake to distil all issues around the NHS into the simple issue of money. That subcontracts the responsibility for safe, high-quality care to politicians. If we are going to be the safest and the best quality system in the world, that has to be everyone's job, everyone's focus and everyone's commitment—politicians, yes, but managers, doctors, nurses, porters, healthcare assistants and every single person working in NHS.

On the way forward, we first need to move to accountable care organisation models and the “Five Year Forward View”, including the STP process. The shadow Health Secretary called STPs “secret plans”, but in fact 28 of the 44 have been published and the rest will be published before Christmas. Many in the House, on both sides, objected to the Health and Social Care Act 2012 because they felt it did not do enough to support integrated care. Well, now we have a process that is bringing together the NHS and the social care system, acute trusts and

primary care, at a local level. That is a big prize and we should support it, not try to make political capital out of it.

Robert Ffello: In Stoke-on-Trent, the CCGs sit on the STP group. We have still not seen the report, but we have seen an executive summary. When the STP group suggests one thing, the CCG undermines it by closing community hospitals and cutting community beds. They are not working together; they are working against each other.

Mr Hunt: That is exactly what we need to sort out. We have the STP process to stop people doing their own thing, instead of having a co-ordinated, well-planned strategy. If we stick with this process, embrace innovation and technology and retain a relentless focus on safety and quality of care, in this Parliament we will see a million more people accessing mental health treatment every year; 5,000 more doctors working in general practice and a transformation of services through GPs; a new four-week cancer waiting time standard that will save 30,000 lives a year; more failing hospitals turned around; the weekend effect tackled; more doctors and nurses; and an NHS staying true to the promise made to patients in 1948 that safe, high-quality care would be there for everyone, regardless of income. That is what this Conservative Government will deliver, and I urge the House to support the amendment.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the SNP spokesperson, I must inform hon. Members that, including her speech, we have calculated, generously, that every speaker will have five minutes, but we will probably have to go down to four minutes at some point.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Does that include five minutes for me also?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Obviously the hon. Lady has no speech limit, but the speech limit has been calculated with her mind. I am just saying that the longer someone speaks for, the less time everyone else will have.

5.17 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Okay, well that is fairly disappointing, given what I have prepared.

UK-wide, the NHS faces sustainability issues. One of the key issues is the increase in demand from an ageing population and the increasing complexity of those demands. The way to tackle that demand is through public health and social care that ensures that those people do not end up in the most expensive place. Secondly, we have a lack of staff, both nurses and doctors. The lack of training nurses has been referred to. We also face the threat of losing some of our staff from the EU. The third threat to sustainability is money, but the money is the one we can fix, because money is a decision; the others will take a decade each to fix—by training more nurses and doctors, preventing illness and finding better ways to look after an ageing population.

[Dr Philippa Whitford]

As I have said in the Chamber before, I welcome the idea of STPs, because they should mean a return to place-based planning and integration and a move away from fragmentation and competition. The problem is, however, that they have to be based on patient-centred care, whereas, according to what is leaking out, they are being discussed on the basis of budget-centred care. We heard in the Health Committee that the STP groups were being given a figure that they had to meet by 2021 and then were working back from that. That will never work.

If we want to decrease inefficiency and increase efficiency we need to target the inefficiencies in the system, not just take an axe to the whole thing. When hospitals or GPs run out of money and take urgent action, it will be poorly-thought-out and immediate-survival action. We need to look at where the fat is and at the natural inefficiencies in the system, and some of that comes down to the lack of integration. STPs are a great opportunity but an opportunity we will look back on as missed if we do not do it properly.

The Secretary of State says that there is no privatisation in the NHS, but there certainly is marketisation and outsourcing. I graduated in 1982, so I have lived through every single iteration from both sides and three Governments. In 1982, we were just skimped. Basically, the NHS got 5% of GDP and it dropped to 4.5% over the '80s. Instead of increasing that to where it is now, what we had was constant redesign.

The first was the internal market and GP purchasing. A GP would refer to our clinic, but if I decided the patient was not surgical and I referred them to gynaecology, the GP would refuse to pay. What started to happen? Surgeons and clinicians began sending the patient back to the GPs, so that they would refer them. Of course patients fell through the cracks; some never got that second referral and things were missed.

After the purchaser-provider split, we started to change the whole shape. We went from 100 health authorities to 300 primary care trusts, even though the leaders of the PCTs earned the same money as the leaders of the health authorities. People were made redundant and transitional change was hugely expensive. In the mid-2000s, we went from 300 PCTs to 150—again with redundancy and transition. As we move on, we start to see the private finance initiatives. As has been said, the NHS has paid over £60 billion for £11 billion-worth of buildings. That was not an effective thing to do.

Eventually, of course, we come to the Health and Social Care Act 2012, which got rid of the 150 PCTs and replaced them with 211 clinical commissioning groups. This is described as “putting power in the hands of the GPs”, but following a freedom of information request I know that less than 18% of CCGs have a GP majority on them. Some 47% of CCGs do not even have a clinical majority, so the idea that the power of the CCGs is giving power back to primary care is, I am afraid, a complete fallacy.

What we have seen, I am afraid, has come from all Governments. It was the Labour Government that took the purchaser-provider split and introduced independent treatment centres, giving them block grants. All the talk about patient choice was not really patient choice at all: the GP had to send the patient to the ITCs for their hips, because it had already been paid for. To try to

counteract that, we have seen payment by results, which was the forerunner of the tariff. What that did was increase activity, so it helped with waiting lists and waiting times, but what we now have is activity that is just growing and growing. Hospitals get paid for activity, not for whether that activity is right.

In Scotland, we abandoned trusts in 2004, and we abandoned primary care trusts in 2009. Let us look at our costs book, which publishes the costs of administration. This is not just the costs of the market; it deals with all the administration of the NHS. Ours has fallen from 7.6% in 2006-07 to 6.7% in 2015-16. When it comes to the Department of Health or NHS England, no one has any idea. A piece of work was done for the Department of Health in 2005, which estimated admin costs at that time as being 14%. I suggest that the current market is an awful lot more complex than it was then.

I think some things can be done around procurement. In Scotland, our national procurement gives hospitals a choice of 9,000 items. The supply chain in England has 600,000 items. It is not limiting; it is not national procurement. Our logistics division, which delivers that, will pick items per ward and deliver them all the way from a central depot to that ward. That allows us to cut some of the costs, as suggested in the Carter review.

We absolutely need to keep agency prices down. It is important to try to keep staff on a staff bank rather than get them through agencies. Why are we not asking the bigger question? Why are nurses choosing to work for an agency rather than the NHS? Is it that they earn more money? Is it flexibility? Is it family-friendliness? Would it not be better to look at how we let them work, so that they work for us rather than feeling that they have to go and work in an agency? From the point of view of job quality and job satisfaction, they would all rather be in one place than be in a different place every week.

There are things that could be done. There could be a better use of community pharmacies, and a better use of community hospitals for “step up” and “step down” services. It is crucial that we fund social care so that elderly people are looked after in their own homes. I think that STPs have potential. However, I ask the Secretary of State not to go on and on with marketisation, given that no cost-benefit analysis has ever been carried out and there is no evidence of benefit from it. The NHS could save an amount that is estimated conservatively at £5 billion a year, and that would have a significant impact on the debt.

The right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) suggested that we needed to bring solutions. I am offering the ones that I can think of from Scotland, and I recommend them to the Secretary of State.

5.25 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford).

I want to touch briefly on the importance of clear data, the current financial position, and the need to agree on a settlement for the future in this House rather than continuing to have such confrontational debates.

I can see how the £10 billion figure has been arrived at: by adding an extra year, starting from 2014-15, and by transferring budgets to NHS England. When the

Secretary of State refers to the NHS, he is actually referring to NHS England. He is not including public health. He is not, for example, including Health Education England. However, it is crucial that they are considered. As my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire said, when we talk about transferring money from public health to the NHS England budget, we are cutting off our ability to control the increase in future demand. We face significant challenges, which we will not address unless we invest in those future services.

We sometimes talk about public health as if it were not front-line care, but it is. We are talking about, for instance, services to help people with addictions and sexual health services—really important costs for the NHS. There is also the challenge of the reduction in Health Education England's £5 billion budget, £3.5 billion of which is spent directly on the wages of health service doctors who are undergoing training, but also delivering front-line services. Cuts to Health Education England cut us off from future sustainability, because that is the budget that trains, retains and sustains our existing workforce. This is all crucial to front-line services.

The other way in which the £10 billion figure has been arrived at is by changing the baseline from which we calculate real-terms increases. I would say that it has never been more important than it is now for the public to have confidence in the data that we use. Trying to return us to talking about total health spending is not trying to be awkward; it is trying to be honest with the public. It is difficult to argue that more funding for health and social care is necessary if a £10 billion increase has been claimed. It is important that we continue to use the same consistent baselines that have been used in the past, so that the public can see what has happened to total health spending.

I welcome the front-loading of the settlement, and I welcome the fact that the NHS has been relatively protected in comparison with other departments, but the scale of the increase in demand is extraordinary. When Simon Stevens talked about welcoming the increase that had been granted, he made it clear that it was dependent on a fair settlement for social care and a radical upgrade in public health, and those two aspects are lacking.

I think that both sides are correct. I can see how the Secretary of State has arrived at the £10 billion figure, but whenever that figure is used we should also present a figure that refers to total health spending in the way in which it has always been referred to in the past. I think that that would help to build the Secretary of State's case for an increase in funding as we go forward.

Like others, I hope that we shall see an uplift for social care in the autumn statement, because the impact of social care on the NHS is now profound. There cannot be a Member in the House to whom it has not been made clear by people who come to his or her surgery that the state of the care system is in collapse and providers are in retreat. Even those who can afford to pay are finding it difficult to gain access to care.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): In my constituency there are some villages where no social care is available because none of the private providers can afford to deliver it. Does the hon. Lady, in her role as Select Committee Chair, know whether that applies in other parts of the country as well?

Dr Wollaston: We know it does, and the CQC report describes social care as being at a tipping-point; it is in a very fragile state and we owe it to all our constituents to try to come together to agree where we go from here. Many have proposed a royal commission to look at future sustainability, but we have had commissions: the Barker commission set out the options, and the House of Lords is looking at future sustainability and the range of options.

I urge colleagues across the House to try to agree, rather than having this continual confrontational debate. The best way forward would be for all parties in this House to agree that this is an enormous challenge. My personal belief is that we should stick with our current very equitable system of state funding of our NHS, look at the various options and agree between us that we need to address this. We cannot keep ducking it; we owe it to all our constituents to adopt a much more constructive tone to our debate.

We know that the current position is unsustainable, and that was reiterated in today's National Audit Office report. We can continue to shout across the Chamber about how much is spent, but we know this will be a challenge whoever is in power, and I urge all colleagues to focus instead on a different approach. Yes, more can be done within the NHS, but I am afraid that the elastic is stretched far too tight for social care to make any more efficiencies. We now need to work together to see how we can fund this going forward.

5.31 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The NHS in Wirral is facing its gravest crisis, which is why I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. Cheshire and Merseyside's so-called sustainability and transformation plan was published last Wednesday, and it is a piece of work that is shocking in its complacency, Orwellian in its use of language and potentially devastating in its consequences.

The Secretary of State has described these plans as open and transparent, but Wirral borough council has had zero involvement in the development of this plan. The first it knew about it was when it was posted on the NHS website last Wednesday.

I want to make three quick observations about the flaws in the STP process, which have become increasingly apparent as it has developed. The first concern is that the NHS has been starved of money and these plans are more about cutting the finances than reconfiguring the services. The second concern is that this has been a top-down process organised in a secretive way by the NHS. The third concern is that the extremely tight deadlines imposed on the process make it impossible to achieve any meaningful consultation or public buy-in.

The plans developed for Merseyside and Cheshire will affect services in Wirral. The plan was published on Wednesday. It confirmed that our local health services have been massively underfunded by this Government to the tune of £1 billion. But rather than providing the necessary resources to meet patient needs, the plan sets out massive cuts. It confirms the existence of entirely new meanings for some familiar words and phrases in the English language as well as elevating management gobbledegook to a form of high art.

In NHS-speak we now know that "sustainability" really means closing all deficits, and in Merseyside and Cheshire this means £1 billion of cuts; "openness and

[Ms Angela Eagle]

transparency” actually means developing these plans in secret and in total isolation from local partners; and “the current acute configuration within this footprint is unsustainable” is gobbledegook for mass hospital closures, mergers and the downgrading of accident and emergency services.

The report aims to make these huge savings by merging existing hospitals across the region, downgrading accident and emergency services and cutting access to maternity provision. It makes the heroic assumption that if care is provided closer to home, services will become cheaper and demand will go down. The report is silent on the future for Wirral acute services, despite its ominous observation that there needs to be a review to “determine future options for hospital reconfiguration”.

Wirral health trust’s annual report has let the cat out of the bag, however, by confirming that the merger of Arrowe Park hospital, the Countess of Chester hospital and parts of Clatterbridge hospital is being considered. This threatens to leave Wirral devoid of any acute services and to leave my constituents with increasingly difficult journeys if they are to access any acute care at all. It is a fact that Wirral local authority has had zero opportunity to be involved in the development of the plans despite the NHS planning guidelines for STPs asking those NHS managers developing them to “engage with local authorities and other partners in their development”.

It is a fact that this process has been the opposite of transparent. It is also a fact that the proposals contained within it are unacceptable.

The NHS needs more funding urgently. The STP process must be slowed down so that there can be meaningful consultation. The Government should end the top-down planning in secret and open up the process to involve the public and patients in their local communities, as well as other statutory authorities and staff. That is why I have launched a petition to ask the Government to press the pause button on these plans so that they can be properly considered by patients, the public and staff. It can be found at www.savewirralnhs.com. Please visit and sign the petition. Together we have to fight to save Wirral NHS.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Following that public service announcement, I must reduce the time limit for Back-Bench speeches to four minutes.

5.36 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I want to make five constructive proposals to help NHS funding. The first relates to prevention, which we have not heard nearly enough about in the debate so far. It is wholly unacceptable that a third of our children are obese by the age of 11. We have learned today that many children typically consume the equivalent of a bathful of sugary drinks every year. We also know that England and Wales are ranked at D minus in the global fitness matrix, and that Scotland is ranked at F.

If we could get these things right early on in our children’s lifetimes, we would be in a much stronger position. One way of doing that would be to extend the excellent work of St Ninian’s primary school in Stirling, which has pioneered the use of the daily mile. All the

children run—if they cannot manage that, they walk—a mile at some point each day. This has had dramatic results: not one of the school’s 57 children is overweight, and there has been a significant reduction in coughs and colds. The exercise has helped to develop the children’s social, emotional and mental wellbeing as well as their physical wellbeing. The idea has been taken up across the Netherlands and Belgium, and I would like to see a lot more of it across our own country.

Secondly, we need to do a huge amount of work on health literacy in relation to self-care. I commend to Members the report from the all-party parliamentary group on primary care and public health, which came out in March this year. It showed that there were 3.7 million visits to A&E and 52 million visits to GPs for self-treatable conditions in 2014. It is estimated that if we could deal with that by persuading people to go to the appropriate place, we could save the NHS more than £2 billion a year.

My third point relates to gatekeeping in our hospitals. I commend the initiative taken in Fife in Scotland, where having senior consultant input in A&E has led to a reduction of 30% in acute surgical admissions. My own local hospital, the Luton and Dunstable, has introduced a similar methodology for patients with acute conditions, and that is also bearing fruit.

My fourth point relates to quality, which we have not heard nearly enough about today. I urge Members to look more fully at the work of the Getting it Right First Time initiative, which the Government have now spread across 18 medical specialties. It started in orthopaedics, and the Government estimate that it will save £1.5 billion a year. This is about not only a financial saving, but better outcomes for patients, who may have undergone the wrong operation or received poor-quality care and had to have significant revisions. That project is getting data from across the country. For example, the rate of return for another procedure within 90 days following oral and maxillofacial cancer surgery varies from 8.33% in some hospitals to over 80% in others. That degree of variation is simply unacceptable. If we can get a higher level of quality, that can lead to much better outcomes for patients and the NHS saving money, too.

Finally, enhanced recovery programmes, such as the advanced transfer team in South Warwickshire, have led to significant increases in productivity with better outcomes for patients. We need to see much more of that across the country.

5.40 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): The “South West London Five Year Forward Plan”, published last week, states its intention to save a staggering £828 million by 2020—a contribution to the attempted national saving of £22 billion by 2020. However, that draft sustainability and transformation plan, published by the south-west London partnership, does not shed much light on how it will actually be managed other than by reducing A&E attendance by 40% in three years. That is a totally implausible aim that has not been achieved by any health system in the world—let alone one so strapped for cash.

That unsustainable ambition brings us to the long-standing proposal, which has so often been denied, to reduce the number of acute hospitals in south-west London from five to four or even—God help us—three.

The five acute hospitals are St George's, Croydon, Kingston, Epsom and St Helier, whose closure I have been fighting for 18 years. Of those five acute hospitals, St George's will rightly be protected from closure. It is also clear that Croydon university hospital or Kingston hospital are unlikely to close, which leaves just St Helier and Epsom, both of which have been under threat before. No amount of vaguely-worded statements from the partnership will change the fact that the intention is to close St Helier. The STP clearly states that the partnership needs to

"Review our acute hospitals to ensure that we meet the changing demands of our populations, and to ensure that acute providers deliver high quality, efficient care... we will need four acute hospital sites in south west London".

It continues by stating that the partnership will

"undertake further work, including analysis of revenue implications on 3, 4 and 5 site options".

Not only will one acute site definitely close, but commissioners are considering the closure of two sites. We know from the STP's former iteration in 2011, the Better Services Better Values programme, that the closure of St Helier was the main recommendation. Despite that, however, colleagues on the Government Benches, including the hon. Members for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) and for Twickenham (Dr Mathias), have been taken in by the STP, peddling the myth that no hospitals will close.

When is a closure a closure? If A&E and maternity services, and all the associated diagnostic and other services, are removed, that is precisely a closure. I want to make it clear to the House, the Government, the partnership and, most importantly, my constituents that we have come together as a community before to fight the closure of St Helier hospital and will do it again. We will do that not only for those who use St Helier, but for those who use every hospital in south-west London. The closure of St Helier would mean the undermining of all those other hospitals.

5.43 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I start by commending all the hard-working people in our national health service—doctors and nurses—for the increased activity in our NHS over the past several years. The NHS has never worked harder. We have never seen so many patients treated in our NHS and standards are certainly improving. However, we must face up to the fact that indices of mortality and morbidity that are amenable to healthcare are poor against reasonable international comparators. I am not satisfied by comparing the UK with the OECD average; I want to compare the UK with countries with which my constituents would wish it to be compared, such as France, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Denmark. I am afraid that our performance is behind the curve on such comparisons, and that is the challenge that we face.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), I am increasingly cautious about the £10 billion figure, so I urge my Front-Bench colleagues to provide clarity on it. We need to be clear about what it actually relates to. I commend the Government for spending this amount on our NHS, despite the opposition from Labour Members. If we are to have a collaborative and collegiate debate, we need some humility from them on this point, as Labour undoubtedly opposed such an amount at the last general election. However, we need

to understand what the £10 billion is and what it is not. According to the Nuffield Trust, the King's Fund and the Health Foundation, we are more likely to be talking about £4.5 billion. The reason for that, which was elegantly laid out by my hon. Friend, relates to which year we use to baseline, which year we use to base our prices on, and whether we include or exclude the money that has been removed from the public health function of local government and from Health Education England. I would contend, as I believe she would, that those moneys need to be included in the sum total for healthcare in this country, and I think that that is what our constituents would understand as the totality of healthcare. That alternative figure therefore seems to be more reasonable.

I am also worried about the £22 billion in savings on which Simon Stevens based his five year forward view. The National Audit Office report published today suggests strongly that this process is not likely to result in anything like £22 billion and that those savings are "untested"—that is polite speak for unachievable. We know that the deficit is being dealt with through a transfer from capital to revenue, and from the sustainability element of the sustainability and transformation fund. That is not sustainable in the long term. We want more transformation; we do not want to have to rely increasingly on the sustainability bit.

Tomorrow, we must look for a big cash injection to sort this out, but I submit that we then need a long-term commission—perhaps not a royal commission, as royal commissions take for ever and cost the earth—that will involve a debate about how we pay for our health service in the long term, given the pressures that we face. That might involve a hypothecated tax. The end to the triple lock could save £2.1 billion by 2020-21, and that money could then be hypothecated to the NHS in the interests of generational fairness, given that the elderly consume the largest portion of healthcare spend. We also need to look at fiscal incentives relating to employees' private medical insurance. But we need to do all this within a Beveridge envelope that delivers an NHS that is free at the point of need.

5.47 pm

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), whose points about hypothecation were particularly interesting.

Long-suspected proposals to downgrade Darlington Memorial hospital were confirmed by the leak of the STP by Hartlepool Borough Council. I am grateful to the council for allowing the document to enter the public domain. Darlington Memorial serves not only the town of Darlington, with its population of about 100,000, but communities living far into the Durham and the Yorkshire dales—Barnard Castle, Northallerton and beyond. Darlington is also the closest major town to Catterick garrison, the largest army base in Europe, which is set to expand yet further. Nearby hospitals have already been downgraded in recent years, with changes to emergency cover at Bishop Auckland hospital and to maternity services at the Friarage hospital in Northallerton. When those changes were made, in the face of enormous local opposition, residents were assured that services at the next nearest hospital, Darlington Memorial, would be safe.

[Jenny Chapman]

Darlington Memorial is special to me, perhaps even more so than it is to many of my constituents—I make no apologies for that. Both my parents were nurses, and we lived in nurses' accommodation at Darlington hospital for a while when I was eight or nine. My dad died at that hospital, as did my grandmother. My two sons were born there, and have made regular and at times unexpected use of its services ever since.

I do accept that, for some specialist services, there is a benefit to centralisation. I absolutely support clinically driven decision making. When cardiac services were moved from Darlington to Middlesbrough, it did not lead to a campaign—it was the right choice for patients, it improved outcomes and I supported it. However, major trauma is already located at James Cook University hospital in Middlesbrough, and the argument now is about centralising services that do not have problems in their outcomes. There is also no clinical gain for patients through such a change, which makes the proposal just wrong.

Another concern relates to the amount that has been spent on so-called engagement activity with the local community to explain the downgrading plans to residents and find out what they think about them. Answers to written parliamentary questions show that £4.6 million has been spent on such activities so far. That is a disgrace, and those responsible should be held to account, as they have wasted public money and are now misleading the public about the fact that there is absolutely nothing to show for that.

In recent months, a campaign to save Darlington hospital has been growing. People from SOS Darlington have been out campaigning in the town centre, knocking on doors, and holding coffee mornings, and they have done it all for free. They have managed to engage 6,000 people. They are doing a better job of engaging the public and they are doing it for absolutely nothing. There is no clinical case for downgrading services at Darlington hospital. Everyone involved knows that, which is why so much time and money is being spent on making up ways to persuade patients that it is a good idea.

The STP's description of my constituents as "passive recipients of care" is not helping. The trouble is that the nirvana that the STP tries to support is not achievable without massive—as yet unquantified—amounts of up-front spending.

I admit that my attachment to my local hospital goes beyond the utilitarian, but I understand enough about how this process is unravelling to know that staff at Darlington Memorial hospital and their patients—my constituents—deserve an awful lot better.

5.51 pm

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): Our national health service is, and always has been, valued and cherished by my constituents who rightly expect an excellent standard of care to be provided free at the point of use when they need treatment. We are all deeply committed to the future of the NHS, but to ensure that it can continue to provide the quality of care that our constituents expect, it cannot stand still. It needs to continue to transform the way in which it delivers services so that more resources lead directly to better care for patients.

Both the total NHS budget and the amount of NHS spending as a proportion of total Government spending have increased in every single year since 2010. Spending is now 10.1% higher per head in real terms than in 2010, and that increase has brought our health spending as a proportion of GDP broadly in line with that of our western European neighbours. In order to achieve best value from its resources and to deliver £22 billion of efficiency savings—those are savings that the NHS identified as achievable in its five year forward view—it is necessary to reconfigure the way in which health and social care services are delivered at a local level. That is a huge issue, and until we amalgamate social care budgets with health budgets to deliver a truly health-driven service with proper health-led care in the community, we will struggle with this for many years. I mention that not to cause controversy, but to highlight the difficult decisions ahead. Too often those decisions and the long-term sustainability of our local services are hindered by ideology, local politics and empire protections over budgets.

A few weeks ago, the West Yorkshire and Harrogate STP was published, setting out the vision, ambitions and priorities for the future of health and care in the region. This built on the significant work that was completed locally by both the Calderdale and the Greater Huddersfield clinical commissioning groups, which have been working together to address the significant challenges facing the health economy across our whole area. The decision to proceed with the development of a full business case was met with considerable concern from some members of the public who have been vociferous in their opposition to what they perceive to be a complete withdrawal of urgent care treatment at Huddersfield royal infirmary. Although the process has been challenging, to say the least, I would argue that it has been absolutely essential. What is certain is that the current model through which health services in Calderdale and Huddersfield are delivered is not sustainable in the long term, and that changes are needed to ensure that we have a local health service that continues to provide excellent care.

Amid some of the sensational media headlines from the local press and the comments of some of my opponents at the last general election, it can be easy to forget that these proposals are being put forward not by politicians or by the Government, but by our senior local clinicians and doctors—the very people who understand how our local health services can best be delivered in the long term. They have taken an independent view about how the additional resources that the Government are making available can directly lead to better care for patients locally, and we have to trust their judgment. However, if we are to receive the support of our constituents for transforming the way in which we deliver their care, we must vastly improve the way in which we communicate any proposed changes and not keep scaremongering about cuts and reduced services, especially when the annual NHS budget spend is increasing in real terms.

5.55 pm

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I want to talk about the Cheshire and Merseyside sustainability and transformation plan and the documents relating to it, which were finally published last Wednesday, although details had been repeatedly leaked. The plans are every bit as full of unrealistic proposals and management newspeak as many of us feared. They amount to a

catastrophic financially driven plan drawn up by managers in secrecy under pressure from the Secretary of State for Health. They are already being implemented, without any of the affected stakeholders or the people of Cheshire and Merseyside ever being asked what they think.

If fully implemented, the STP would involve the merging of the Royal Liverpool, Broadgreen and Aintree hospitals, with the Liverpool Women's hospital being "reconfigured" and merged into the new organisation at a later date. It is planned to be rebuilt nearer the Royal, but there is no NHS money available for the new hospital building. The plans entail the downgrading of hospital A&E services at Whiston hospital, where many of my constituents go, or at Warrington or Southport hospitals, or some combination of all three. Details are not provided.

These shocking cuts and mergers have very little chance of being accepted by the people of Garston and Halewood, for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it is clear that the Cheshire and Merseyside STP is financially driven. This has been admitted by those who have drawn it up. Katherine Sheerin, chief officer of Liverpool clinical commissioning group, accepted this in an interview that she gave in the *Liverpool Echo*. When asked what would happen if these changes were not made, she said:

"If we did nothing, we would not have enough money to run the services. This is about managing that, rather than letting it happen."

When asked if these changes were being driven by cuts, she replied:

"The financial component has been a strong driver".

The King's Fund agrees with her. In its report entitled "Sustainability and Transformation Plans in the NHS", it says:

"The original purpose of STPs was to support local areas to improve care quality and efficiency of services . . . The emphasis from national NHS bodies has shifted over time to focus more heavily on how STPs can bring the NHS into financial balance (quickly)."

Quite so, and we can see this in Katherine Sheerin's answers.

The Cheshire and Merseyside STP has to deal with the pressure of almost a £1 billion gap in its funding by 2021, so making cuts in spending to meet the Government's financial requirement is at the core of these plans. The people of Merseyside are not daft—they can see this. The Cheshire and Merseyside STP requires £755 million of capital funding, which is now no longer available. In Liverpool alone, our hospitals' deficit is estimated to be £276.5 million. In her *Liverpool Echo* interview, Katherine Sheerin suggested that Liverpool City Council would provide the missing capital funding.

Ms Angela Eagle: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. The Wirral Borough Council was not asked to participate at all. Was the Liverpool authority asked to participate?

Maria Eagle: Neither Liverpool City Council nor Knowsley Borough Council has been consulted at all about the plans. However, when asked where she was going to get the money for the new hospital, Katherine Sheerin said:

"There's limited capital available but there are options to explore. Councils tend to be able to access borrowing at a very cheap rate."

There we have it: Liverpool City Council is expected to stump up the money to implement what is supposed to be a key part of the strategy—building a new women's hospital. However, this is the same Liverpool City Council that has had 58% of its money from central Government removed—first by the Lib Dem-Tory coalition and then by the Tory Governments after 2010—and that relies for almost three quarters of its income on that Government grant. This is the same Liverpool City Council that already spends £151 million on adult social services for its ageing population, but that can raise only £147 million in council tax. This is the same Liverpool City Council that is expected to find another £90 million of savings over the next three years and that is facing some extremely invidious choices to balance its budget.

My second point is this: these plans have been drawn up in near secrecy by NHS managers, and without consultation with those who are now being exhorted to help. Neither Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council nor Liverpool City Council has been asked what it thinks. Consequently, both say, unsurprisingly, that they are opposed to the plans. In Liverpool, the ruling Labour group has made it clear that it will oppose any STP that proposes cuts, and the Mayor of Liverpool has said publicly that he opposes the proposed closure of the Women's hospital and will campaign to keep a women's hospital in Liverpool. I agree with him. Labour in Liverpool will support any change to existing provision only if it improves services to women in Liverpool.

The current plans are already being implemented, and that is another thing we cannot allow to go ahead without proper consultation.

6.1 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My starting point is that funding in the NHS must be used effectively and efficiently. To that end, we expect the NHS to deliver savings and best value for money.

There are a number of issues relating to social care in the NHS where there is considerable scope for solving existing problems, for ensuring that better health care is delivered and for achieving sustainability, and there is no better place to start the discussion of those issues than bed-blocking.

Oxfordshire's historical performance on bed-blocking is poor. It came 151st in terms of headcount last November, with 158 people. Bed-blocking decreases the availability of beds and has adverse effects on patients, particularly when they are elderly—for example, incontinence in the over-65s increases, and muscle wasting in the over-80s after 10 days of hospitalisation is equivalent to 10 years of muscle wasting otherwise.

By September, the headcount had fallen to 113 people, improving the county's performance to 108th—a massive improvement of 50 places over that period. That was achieved through a joint initiative by the clinical commissioning group, Oxford University Hospitals, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and the county council, all working to move people out of hospital when they have been appropriately treated.

However, that improvement was also achieved by putting £2 million into funding extra temporary care beds in care homes, where people can stay until they are ready to return to their own homes, move to a permanent care home or receive care in their own homes. That joint and positive thinking is something I would encourage as we integrate social care and the NHS.

Craig Whittaker: Does my hon. Friend agree that one lever for discouraging bed-blocking would be to join up some of the budgets around health and social care?

John Howell: I do, and that is precisely what the organisations in Oxfordshire have been trying to achieve.

The second point I would make relates to how we produce better-serving hospitals. In my own area, the Townlands Memorial Hospital, which is in Henley but which serves the whole of south Oxfordshire, has recently gone through a major reorganisation. It now has an increased number of facilities serving the population of the area, but the beds are not in the hospital. Although limited in number, they are in an adjoining care home, whose opening I happened to attend with the Duke of Gloucester only the other day. It is good to see the issues at the hospital finally resolved.

That is the way forward for local hospitals: better treatment for people in their home through a system of what has come to be called ambulatory care. Such a system prevents the problems I mentioned, with patients suffering when they stay in hospital for a long time. This view comes not from politicians but from clinicians both local and national. The national clinicians I would point to are those in the Royal College of Physicians, who are fully behind this process. This method costs more in the first instance but provides better value for money and increases better patient outcomes.

The third area I want to discuss is what can happen when we integrate the staff providing care who are employed by the county council and those who are employed by the NHS. This allows us to ensure that the pay and service requirements of both groups of people, who are doing exactly the same job, can be harmonised in a much more positive way. That sets out a good scope for efficiency in the operation of social care within the NHS model. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), in that I would like to see them fully integrated, but until then I have set out a very good method of being able to operate in those circumstances and to co-operate in order to achieve the outcomes that I have mentioned.

Sustainability and transformation plans focus on organisations working together and are the best hope of improving health and social care services in the long term. That is not my view but that expressed by the King's Fund when it looked at the plans. I fully agree with its assessment of the situation and of these plans, which are working towards achieving the same outcomes.

6.6 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The funding crisis in the NHS is no accident. It is a political choice made by the Tories for which patients and NHS staff are paying the price in longer waiting times, delayed operations, and increasingly stressful working conditions. It is a crisis driven by the Government's demand that the NHS make £22 billion-worth of efficiency savings—or cuts. This is impossible without huge damage to our national health service.

An analysis by *The Guardian* of 24 of the 44 STPs stated:

“Thousands of hospital beds are set to disappear, pregnant women will face long trips to give birth and a string of A&E units will be downgraded or even closed altogether as part of controversial NHS plans to reorganise healthcare in England...Dozens of England's 163 acute hospitals look likely to have services, including cancer, trauma and stroke care, removed as a result of the plans”.

In the 2015-16 financial year, the NHS reported a record net deficit of £2.45 billion—nearly three times higher than in 2014—and so we see the crisis in services accelerating. Last week, the chief executive of NHS Providers, Dr Chris Hopson, said:

“The NHS simply cannot do all that it is currently doing and is being asked to do in future on these funding levels.”

STPs are supposed to facilitate the integration of health and social care, for which they require the support of council leaders, yet the leader of Wirral Council has said in the past 24 hours that he has not been given the opportunity to feed into the development of the local plan. The STP for Cheshire and Merseyside is of great concern to my constituents because it requires nearly £1 billion to be taken out of local health services. If this goes ahead, the impact on the NHS will be devastating; it is impossible that it would be otherwise.

There was recently a proposal to close Arrowe Park hospital, Clatterbridge hospital and Countess of Chester hospital and build a new hospital in Ellesmere Port, and there has been no denial that such a conversation has taken place. The annual report of the foundation trust that runs Arrowe Park and Clatterbridge says:

“The Trust will explore with Countess of Chester Hospital the potential for the development of a single acute general hospital covering Wirral and west Cheshire within the next 10-15 years ...Another option is to move all planned surgery and procedures to Clatterbridge, while Arrowe Park will become a ‘hot site’ dealing mainly with emergencies.”

It is not clear what a “hot site” is if it is not a hospital. Surely the point about an A&E is that it needs to be in a place where there is a very wide range of expertise on how to deal with any emergency. I have very real concerns about the future of Arrowe Park hospital, which is a major hospital highly valued by my constituents who use its services and who work there; indeed, it is a major employer in my constituency. The STP talks of “hospital reconfiguration”. It is no wonder that local people are up in arms about the plans.

The STP for Cheshire and Merseyside appears to set a great deal of store by the development of ACOs, or accountable care organisations. These are an idea brought from America, where of course there is no national health service. They integrate health and social care, and have a strong emphasis on cost reduction. The core issue is that people in England often pay for social care, but certainly do not expect to pay for healthcare, other than through direct taxation. There is real concern that the introduction of ACOs through STPs is part of a desire on the part of the Government to introduce a private insurance-based healthcare system in England instead of our national health service. I would be grateful if the Minister could give some clarification on that point.

It is my belief that the Government are cutting the supply of healthcare in the public sector to create demand for a private health insurance marketplace like the one in America, and there is nothing in the STP to reassure me that that is not the case. The document is riddled with the language of the market, talking of increased customer satisfaction, better user experience and “commercially sustainable” clinical support services. If the STPs go ahead across England, we can expect to see A&E closures, hospital closures, downgrading of services, patients waiting longer for treatment, and deterioration in the pay and conditions of staff as the

drive to cut costs takes its toll. I urge the Government to use the autumn statement to address the underfunding of the NHS and to give it the funds it needs.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): May I just make an apology to *Hansard*? It is one thing reading a speech, but that was a record level of reading into the record. I appreciate that time is short and that the hon. Lady wanted to put those things on the record, but if she speaks a little bit slower and allows other Members to understand what she is saying, it will give them an opportunity to intervene and she will gain some extra time.

6.10 pm

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Speaking for myself, I was impressed by the pace of the hon. Lady's speech.

In this short contribution, I want to address the supply of practitioners, not just the supply of money. I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that since we have regulated many more practitioners, many more practitioners should be available on the health service. The Professional Standards Authority chief Harry Cayton has called for a much greater use of those on his register. He says:

"We all know we need to deliver new, innovative ways to improve people's health... That means looking beyond the traditional confines of our health and care system and the traditional health professions."

The 23 organisations on his register—including the Federation of Holistic Therapists, the Society of Homeopaths and the British Acupuncture Council—regulate 20,000 practitioners.

The treatment of lower back pain needs much greater consideration. Since the regulation of chiropractors and osteopaths in Bills that I was involved with 20 years ago, there has been far too little communication with orthopaedic surgeons. There is an organisation called ARMA—the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance—but I ask my hon. Friend to look at the matter and see how much more effective integration can be. NICE now recommends acupuncture for lower back pain, as I hope it will continue to do, and that should be brought in.

On Brexit, we have the European legislation to consider. Three directives need close scrutiny when we take them over. The traditional herbal medicines directive has struck out proven Chinese medicines and other herbal medicines, the food supplements directive is very restrictive and tougher regulation will be needed when we get our hands on the food additives directive.

The chief medical officer wrote a report in the last Parliament on antimicrobial resistance. One of the most effective ways of stopping antibiotic use is to use homeopathic medicine, which has a proven record in upper respiratory tract infection treatment. We also need to go back to the '90s to look at the GP fundholding system that was available in John Major's Government, whereby doctors could commission complementary and alternative medicine practitioners. A clinic known as "The Crypt" in Marylebone saved £500,000 in one year using homeopathic treatments. When that was struck out by the new Labour Government, the clinic overspent its drug budget by £1.5 million.

There have been a lot of attacks in the past few years on homeopathy, which is an honourable and well-served practice of medicine with its own doctors, regulated in

this country and used in 41 of 42 European countries. Some of those attacks have been from an organisation called the Good Thinking Society, which really consists of one man and a dog. It spends £100,000 a year, £20,000 of which comes from the taxpayer through its charitable status; I think that that is an absolute scandal. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister not to listen to the siren voices of that small, badly represented group. We need to use the discipline of homeopathy. We must not allow lawyers sending letters to clinical commissioning groups and others to derail the availability in the health service of that very well-established and popular system of medicine.

6.14 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): For all the wrong reasons, St George's hospital in Tooting has been in the news recently. First, it appeared on the front page of a national newspaper because it was requiring people to show an ID before coming in and giving birth. Secondly, it was rated inadequate in a recent CQC inspection. Finally, figures were released showing one patient waited 36 hours in A&E before being admitted to the hospital.

The one question we are all asking is: why? Why are the roofs in the theatres leaking? Why are the computer systems inadequate? Why has Wandsworth Council been forced to cut almost £10 million from social care budgets? Why does my local hospital trust have a deficit of £50 million? Everywhere we look, the answer is a lack of funding.

We should not leave our hospitals with the bare minimum to function; we should prioritise their funding. It is a healthcare system: we cannot take risks. If we do, it will result in a loss of life—people die. The Health Secretary can point the finger at whomever he wants, but it is not because of our doctors, who always go the extra mile, our trainee nurses, who have had their bursaries cut, or our carers, who are overworked and underpaid. I am afraid the Conservative Government are to blame.

I have worked in our NHS under a Labour Government and under a Conservative Government, and there is a significant difference. Staff morale is at an all-time low, as is patient morale. This Government are failing patients. Government Members know it, and Opposition Members know it. St George's has not had significant resources put into it since Labour was in government. This is not a one-off story; it is happening up and down the country.

When Labour was in government, our healthcare system was a truly national health service: we saw more doctors, better equipment, new hospitals, and happier and healthier patients. Under this Conservative Government, waiting times are rising, buildings are falling apart and patients' lives are being put at risk. We are making life and death decisions on the basis of costs. Our NHS is in crisis, and this crisis is turning into a disaster before our very eyes. The NHS was built by a Labour Government, it was saved by a Labour Government and it will be a Labour Government who rescue it.

6.17 pm

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I am very pleased to pick up where the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) left off. Quite frankly, I find it extraordinary that Labour Members have the audacity to come into

[David T. C. Davies]

the Chamber and trumpet their views about the national health service when they know that they have had 18 years of running the NHS in another part of the United Kingdom and that, on any of the performance indicators that are looked at, the NHS in Wales is performing less well than the NHS in England. I do not for one minute want anyone to think that I am criticising NHS staff—the nurses and doctors—because I am not, and I am not running down Wales either, because I know exactly where the blame lies. It lies at the feet of the Labour party for implementing exactly the same policies that Labour Members are now calling on the Minister to implement.

There is no need to take my word, or that of any Conservative, for this; one can simply get hold of the Nuffield Trust report on “The four health systems of the United Kingdom: how do they compare?” This independent report looked at a range of indicators, and it makes this very clear. I am very happy to read from the report, which in its own way is far stronger than anything the Conservative party could publish. It says that waiting times in Wales have lengthened since 2010, with striking rises in waits for common procedures such as knee and hip replacements. When language such as “striking rises” is used, surely people should take notice of the report, especially when, as Labour Members must realise, those striking rises are being caused by the policies they are asking my hon. Friends to implement.

The report talks about how amenable mortality rates are lowest in England. In other words, people live longer in England. It also talks about waiting times, which are an absolute disgrace. There is a target waiting time of 26 weeks in Wales, whereas it is just 18 weeks in England. More than that, the report shows that some people are waiting for up to 170 days for knee and hip replacements in Wales, as opposed to just 70 days in England.

The report shows that funding in Wales has been cut in real terms. Wales is the only part of the United Kingdom where funding for the national health service has been reduced; in England it has been going up.

The report shows that there is a shortage of GPs. My hon. Friends have increased the number of GPs to 0.75 per 1,000 people, compared with 0.66 per 1,000 in Wales. On stroke care, 39% of patients spent 90% of their time in a stroke unit, as opposed to 51% of patients in England—a much higher amount. The figures for MRSA show, once again, that England is ahead of Wales. The figures for ambulance response times show that 75% of ambulances make it within eight minutes in England, as opposed to 65% in Wales.

Perhaps one of the most shocking differentials in service between England and Wales is in the access to cancer drugs. Constituents have come to see me because they have had to go sofa-surfing with relatives in England to get access to standards of care that patients on this side of the border take for granted.

I issue a challenge to everyone in this House. If Opposition Members think that the Welsh NHS, the policies of which they want to follow, is as good as the English national health service, they should allow patients to choose. I constantly write to my colleagues on the Front Bench asking them to allow patients from Wales to access the national health service that they are delivering

so well in England. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to do so. We should have a truly national health service that allows people in Wales to go and be treated in England if they want and, indeed, people in England to be treated in Wales if they want, and adjust the block grant accordingly.

In the meantime, I very much hope that my hon. Friends will stick with the policies that are delivering higher standards of healthcare in England because, if nothing else, it means that my constituents have something to aim for and can demand that the Labour party in Wales follows the successful policies that are being followed in England.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): A couple of Members who were on the list are not in the Chamber and will be written to. That means that the last two speakers have up to six minutes each.

6.21 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is not often that the people who come last get more time to speak, so thank you very much for that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The speeches by right hon. and hon. Members from all parts of the Chamber have been exceptional. We should focus on the good things in the NHS, which everyone in this Chamber acknowledges. The passion that we hear in debates like this often comes out of what our constituents tell us.

Margaret Greenwood: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern about the introduction of ACOs through the STPs, which come from America and are often used in insurance-based models of healthcare? Because people here do not pay for healthcare, except through direct taxation, but do pay for social care, there is a lot of concern about the blurring of the boundaries and a worry that we will wind up with people being asked to take out health insurance.

Jim Shannon: I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Lady. Madam Deputy Speaker mentioned how fast she speaks; perhaps she is trying to take away my record. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) says that I do more words to the minute than anybody else in the House. Perhaps the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) is trying to take that mantle, but we will see.

I am the health spokesperson in the House for the Democratic Unionist party. It is a portfolio that needs to be balanced, and we should look for the greater good at every stage. In my opinion, it is the most difficult portfolio for anybody to hold. I am glad that I am not in the position of the Secretary of State for Health, because I would find it difficult to say to a person, “We cannot supply the drugs that you need to prolong your life, but we are hoping to save the life of the person beside you. We need the money to save, rather than prolong, life.” The hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) referred to sofa-surfing and the lottery for those who need access to drugs. Although I do not envy the Government in having to make such decisions, I cannot sit back and not highlight the difficulties that exist within Government funding and the fact that the NHS must have more designated funding to keep it running.

I read with interest the briefing provided by Macmillan. It sent chills down my spine. By the end of this Parliament, about one in every two people will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. I look around the Chamber today and remember that those statistics include us and our loved ones. Indeed, there are some Members in the Chamber who have experienced cancer and are survivors. My own father battled and won against cancer three times. I am aware of what that battle entails, and how much of it is based on the right diagnosis and treatment, the availability of that treatment, the skill of the surgeon's knife and the prayers of God's people—those are all very important. It is clear that improvements in diagnosing and curing the disease mean that more people surviving it are living for longer with it; some 2.5 million people are living with or beyond cancer in the UK today.

In my opinion, more must be done to help those with rare diseases and rare forms of cancer. Will the Minister give us an indication of what funding and resources will be set aside for them? Those rare diseases and cancers are increasing. Put together, those conditions affect a large number of people. I know that funds are not infinite, but we must focus on those with rare diseases and with rare forms of cancer.

I will mention a tremendously courageous lady—I hope she will not mind me mentioning her name in this Chamber—who works in my constituency, called Aundrea Bannatyne. She watched her son battle cancer and triumph, only to be told that she had pancreatic cancer and that there was no treatment for it in Northern Ireland. The help she needs will cost up to £100,000 and the people of the area where she lives, Dundonald, have dug deep to help fund that.

That lady's story could be replicated in the constituency of every Member in this Chamber, across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but the postcode lottery says that she cannot have treatment because she lives in Northern Ireland. However, she would be able to access it in other counties on the mainland, which is something that the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) referred to. That lottery is not what is needed. We need treatment in all areas. That must be addressed by additional funding. Aundrea needs more than us wringing our hands and being sympathetic. She needs practical, physical help. That is the only thing that can change her hopes for her future and her son.

Macmillan has said that one in four people living with or beyond cancer face disability or poor health following their treatment. That can remain the case for many years after the treatment ends. It is vital that they can access the best care—the care that is right for them—when they need it. The NHS must be able to meet the changing needs of cancer patients. That would not only increase the quality and experience of survival, but ensure that resources are invested in the most effective way. That is key, given that the five year forward view projections indicate that expenditure on cancer services will need to grow by some 9% a year, to £13 billion, not to get ahead but simply to stand still. That level of spending is likely to yield outcomes that continue to be below average when compared with similar international healthcare systems. We must therefore act now to ensure that the money is spent as effectively as possible, to give England and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and

Northern Ireland a better chance to achieve world-class cancer outcomes and deliver the Government's manifesto commitment.

The health service currently spends more than £500 million a year on emergency care for people with the four most common cancers alone. If we are spending £500 million on emergency treatment for cancer, there is something wrong with the system that we have to address effectively. Emergency care should be a last resort for people living with cancer. Such a vast amount of emergency care spending is symptomatic of a system that is not geared towards helping people take control of their health.

I am conscious that the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) is waiting to contribute, so I will conclude with this comment. Let us make the right decisions to sustain the NHS as it is—never mind give more, which is what people actually need. If that means taking simple things such as paracetamol off the prescription list, to save £80 million, let us do it.

Let us look at real issues that can make a change. Let us do the simple things for the greater good, and let us determine to be more efficient where possible and cut unnecessary red tape rather than services. Let us ensure that our NHS can withstand not only the surge of cancer diagnoses but the surge of diabetes—other Members have referred to that—heart disease, and all other major illnesses, which are only worsening. I do not envy the Minister's task, but we have to make hard choices. We have to get the funding in the right place, and make decisions that take away bureaucracy and restore funds where they are needed—to cancer, rare diseases and rare cancers.

6.29 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I want to start by saying a huge thank you to everybody in our hospitals, our GP surgeries and our care homes. Listening to the debate, one might be under the impression that brilliant things are not going on, but nine out of 10 people in A&E benefit from being seen within four-hours. This discussion therefore needs to be balanced. I have heard that there are problems up and down the country, but the West Suffolk hospital in my constituency has just been rated as outstanding not for its buildings or anything peripheral, but for its care. That is the most important thing we can ask anyone to give.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) said that things were better under Labour. I was diagnosed with my second and third cancers when Labour was in government. The radiotherapy machines were under a sheet and not working because of a lack of staff. This problem has been coming down the track for ages. We do not do anybody a service if we deny that it is a problem and that it is looming.

GPs in Suffolk are under pressure. I talk to them regularly. I engage with social care, which is struggling. It is about the service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker) said, but we should remember that every patient is a person—a daughter, a mum, a dad. For the five year forward view, we listened and we came to the table with the money. Demand has outstripped us, and we need to look at streamlining services. Having one pot of money will help us to understand the blockages in the system to which so many people, including my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), alluded. We can then look to unblock the system. It is ridiculous to have people on

[Jo Churchill]

delayed discharge because we cannot get them into the community, and then for GPs to send to A&E people who cannot get into the hospital to be treated. We all know the problem; let us look at the solutions.

Prevention is also an issue. The motion today is about far more than cash. The year 1948 is a long time ago and the system has always been a mix of private and public. It is stronger today, but there are 1.4 million in its workforce.

I said “Thank you” earlier. I would especially like to thank junior doctors, many of whom speak to me on a regular basis. They tell me that just a little thank you from people for the hard work they do would make a difference in their daily lives, so I ask for that. Some 92% of the pot of money goes to the acute sector. Our GPs, who we are expecting to do more, receive 8%. Working together would help us to look at what funds are needed for social care.

Moving people through the system is tricky. With an ageing population and comorbidity, 17% of the health budget is spent on long-term conditions. Some 22.4 million people visited A&E last year—up 600,000. I applaud the doctors who are beginning to say, “Do you know what? You can do the odd thing at home. You don’t always have to come and see us.” We need to be more responsible for our own health.

It is important that we look at new ideas. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) mentioned in *The Telegraph* the other day that we should perhaps look at the triple lock. Today, Stephen Dalton, interim chief executive of the NHS, talked about using the private sector more slickly. The provision of care relief for patients could be moved around so that home services are sorted. We need to consider community diagnostics. We need to be able to talk about these new ideas. Let us think about the future.

A young medic told me on Friday how much a 10-hour operation involving nine professionals cost. People need to understand what things cost. A young clinician said to me only yesterday that when somebody does not attend they should be asked to pay. They are sent a text, and there has to be more responsibility.

In this country, where a diabetes crisis is looming, 66% of people are obese; one third drink too much; and 20% smoke too much. We have to decide what we want out of this overburdened system and what we want to put in. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned, the NHS spends around £85 million on paracetamol, yet it can be bought for just 16p. Should we be investing money in different places? If we treasure the NHS, we should treasure ourselves and its resources. The rise in cancer diagnoses is linked to obesity. Some £3.5 billion is spent on treating alcohol-related illnesses. The system is in crisis, but we have ways of addressing it. I do not want this to be a blame game. We have recruited more doctors and nurses, but now we need to step up, talk about the problems and develop a streamlined system.

6.35 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): This has been at times a high-quality and passionate debate that has made clear the concerns across the House about the sustainability of our health service.

The Chancellor sadly could not be with us this afternoon—I assume he has a few other things on right now—but had he been here to hear the contributions from Members on both sides of the House, he would be in no doubt about the severity of the challenges facing the health and social care sector, or about the dire consequences that will follow if he does not deliver the rescue package that is needed tomorrow.

We have heard some excellent contributions. As right hon. and hon. Members have said, while we might have our political differences, we all appreciate the work that our staff in the NHS do—as we do the work of all public sector workers—and we thank them for it. The hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), the Chair of the Health Committee, calmly and clearly explained how cuts to the health budget were used to help the Secretary of State reach his figure of £10 billion. Despite the huge volley of figures he mentioned in his speech, he failed to mention that amount at all. The hon. Lady pointed out how many of the cuts will store up other problems in the long term, and she is right that the moving of the goal posts that has taken place does nobody any credit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), who described the savings required in her area as implausible, is clearly going to fight the closure of St Helier hospital. She rightly pointed out that that closure will undermine other services and hospitals in her area, and I have no doubt that her constituents will be relieved to have such a doughty champion on their side. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke with great sincerity and passion about the variations in cancer treatment and alarming statistics setting out anticipated increases in incidences of cancer. He also rightly highlighted the expenditure on emergency cancer treatments, showing that much more needs to be done on earlier detection.

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman) said that there seemed to be a focus in her area on consolidating services where there was no problem with clinical outcomes, and she made it clear that her constituents would not be fooled into accepting a downgrade in their local hospital. Her local health chiefs have won the award for the worst use of management speak today by calling patients “passive recipients of care”. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) brought her recent experiences of the health service to the Chamber and said of the NHS that everywhere we look the answer is a lack of funding. She told us that staff and patient morale were now at all-time lows, and she should know what she is talking about.

We also heard from the hon. Members for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), for Henley (John Howell) and for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), although none of them referred to the deficits their own STPs were facing—perhaps they do not think there is a problem. I can tell the House, however, that in South West Bedfordshire, the deficit is £311 million; in South West Wiltshire it is £490 million; in Calder Valley it is a staggering £1.07 billion; in Henley it is £479 million; and in Bosworth it is £700 million.

Andrew Selous: I am well aware of the financial challenges in my own area, but I noted in my STP the 26% increase in funding up to 2020-21, which I think is quite commendable.

Justin Madders: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has actually seen his STP; many Members have still not got hold of theirs.

Dr Murrison: How much worse does the hon. Gentleman think that the deficit in South West Wiltshire would have been had Labour won in 2015 and uprated NHS spending by just £2.5 billion, rather than the figure we are currently enjoying?

Justin Madders: Our manifesto was very clear that we would put in £2.5 billion immediately, plus whatever was needed. Indeed, research by the House of Commons Library has shown that if health spending had continued at the levels maintained by the previous Labour Government, there would be an extra £5 billion a year by 2020.

The NHS has deteriorated on every headline performance measure since the Health Secretary took office. It now faces the biggest financial crisis in its history, with providers reporting a net deficit of almost £2.5 billion last year. That deficit was covered only by a series of one-off payments and accounting tricks that do not disguise the true picture of a service that is creaking at the seams, of a workforce stretched to the limit, and of a Health Secretary in denial about his own culpability for this shocking state of affairs. While he rightly paid tribute to the work of NHS staff, he must know that when morale is so low, his platitudes are just not enough.

Ms Angela Eagle: I asked my sister whether Liverpool had had any input into the Merseyside and Cheshire STP. Obviously my hon. Friend represents part of the area that it covers, so can he tell us whether Ellesmere Port has had any involvement in the development of that STP?

Justin Madders: Only last week Cheshire West and Chester Council, which covers the Ellesmere Port area, put forward a resolution indicating that it was not satisfied with its level of involvement in the STP. Indeed, I do not think any council in the Cheshire and Merseyside area is satisfied, including even the Conservative-controlled Cheshire East Council.

Faced with an unprecedented crisis, what did the Secretary of State have to say for himself when asked by the Health Committee about investment in the NHS over the next five years? He said:

“Whether you call it £4.5 billion or £10 billion does not matter.”

Well, it might not matter to him, but it matters to people up and down the country who are desperately worried about the future of their local health services. This is not loose change down the back of the sofa. We know the Secretary of State will not accept what the Chair of the Health Committee said about giving a

“false impression that the NHS was awash with cash”,

so perhaps he will listen instead to the head of the National Audit Office, who said yesterday:

“With more than two-thirds of trusts in deficit in 2015-16 and an increasing number of clinical commissioning groups unable to keep their spending within budget, we repeat our view that the financial problems are endemic and this is not sustainable.”

Perhaps he will listen to the Nuffield Trust, King’s Fund and the Health Foundation, which in a joint statement released this week said:

“The Department of Health’s budget will increase by just over £4 billion in real terms between 2015/16 and 2020/21. This is not enough to maintain standards of NHS care, meet rising demand from patients and deliver the transformation in services outlined in the NHS five year forward view.”

Ministers need to stop trying to hoodwink the public, patients and even their own Back Benchers about the extent of the crisis engulfing our health and social care sector. Every day we hear more about a service crumbling as six years of underinvestment and cuts in social care and public health come home to roost. At the weekend, we heard about the Yorkshire ambulance service piloting a new scheme that might involve heart attack victims waiting up to 40 minutes to get an ambulance. Only yesterday, there were claims from GPs that very young and elderly patients are dying because of worsening delays involving 999 calls. Indeed, the most recent ambulance figures were the worst on record, but what did we hear from the very top of the Government about the NHS this weekend? The only comment we heard was one reportedly attributed to one of the Prime Minister’s assistants that they were going to “fix” Simon Stevens, the chief executive of the NHS, because he had dared to contradict the Prime Minister over funding. I have a suggestion: instead of trying to fix him for telling the truth, why do they not try fixing the NHS instead?

It is time to be honest about where we are and the true nature of the STPs, which are now finally starting to emerge. Let me be clear that we are not opposed to the idea of a more localised strategic oversight of the NHS and the health sector, but it is becoming increasingly obvious that these plans are putting money ahead of everything else. As the British Medical Association set out yesterday:

“There is a real risk that these transformation plans will be used as a cover for delivering cuts, starving services of resources and patients of vital care.”

The few documents released so far reveal cuts to hospitals, services, beds and, in some cases, staff. As we have set out previously, we are deeply concerned by the lack of public, political and even clinical consultation, with two thirds of doctors not having been consulted on the plans and a third of them not even aware that the STPs exist. What a shambles!

It is also clear that without adequate resourcing, these plans will not lead to financial sustainability, and the only transformation that they will deliver will involve reduced services and longer waiting times. If the plans are as wonderful and transformative as Ministers claim, why will they not let us see them? The secrecy and the deliberate instruction not to release any of the information relating to the plans has only increased concern and cynicism among the public. That was, I believe, a serious error of judgment that the Government will come to regret.

We therefore call on the Government to publish immediately the plans that are not already in the public domain. We also ask them to ensure that there is a full consultation process before any of the changes are implemented. Consultation with the public does not mean presenting people with a completed plan and asking them whether they support it; it means involving them from day one, and the bigger the change, the better it is to start the consultation early. We are already playing catch-up, but genuine engagement can start now.

As we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) and for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood),

[Justin Madders]

there are major concerns about the Cheshire and Merseyside STP. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey identified the three fatal flaws in the STP process: it is more about finances than patients; it is secretive; and it is run to deadlines that make consultation impossible. Every Member who talked about the Cheshire and Merseyside proposals rightly expressed concern about the devastating effect that they might have on local services. It seems that just about every council in the area has rejected them, or has said that it has not been involved. Indeed, there has been very little involvement with anyone.

My hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood produced what I think was the runner-up in the competition for the worst use of management speak when she quoted the phrase

“The financial component has been a strong driver”.

That is the nub of it—this is all about money. Ministers must stop trying to pull the wool over our eyes and be realistic about the extent of the crisis that is engulfing our health and social care sector, because not one serious commentator or senior NHS manager believes that the sector will be financially sustainable without additional funding.

The Nuffield Trust, the Health Foundation, the King’s Fund, Unison, the Health Committee, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the Local Government Association, NHS Providers, the British Medical Association, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the NHS Confederation and Age UK are all calling on the Government to act urgently to address the funding gap. I do not know whether that list was long enough for the Secretary of State—he does not appear to be too hot when it comes to numbers at the moment—but there were a dozen respected organisations there. Will he listen to them? Will he implore the Chancellor not to repeat the mistakes of his predecessor, and to ensure that the health and social care sector is given the funding that it needs? This is the last chance before the crisis overwhelms us. I commend the motion to the House.

6.47 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): I am very pleased to be able to close what the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) described as an interesting debate I would describe it as an occasionally high-pitched debate, to which a number of Members made constructive contributions. I must say to the hon. Gentleman that those constructive contributions came from the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), who made a characteristically impressive speech, and from Back Benchers on my side of the House, whose contributions, I might add, outnumbered those from Back-Bench Labour Members by four to three—or one third—although this was an Opposition day debate. Where are the Labour supporters for the motion, I ask the hon. Gentleman? We shall have to see whether they turn up to vote; they certainly were not prepared to turn up to speak.

The funding of the NHS is clearly a subject that is close to the hearts of most Members in the Chamber, precisely because it, along with the contribution of all who work in the NHS—to whom I pay tribute, as did the Secretary of State, but as the hon. Member for

Ellesmere Port and Neston failed to do—is what keeps the NHS going. The Government are committed to the NHS, and committed to ensuring that it is free at the point of use.

Jenny Chapman: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to imply that there was a lack of interest among Labour Members, given that the speaking time limit was cut to four minutes, and then—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. It has been put on the record, and it is a matter of public record, but I will say that speeches were made by nine Opposition Members and eight Government Members. Speeches were made by six Labour Members and eight Conservatives. That may help the House, and may prevent any further arguments.

Mr Dunne: Mr Deputy Speaker, the facts speak for themselves, as you have just told us: eight Conservative Back Benchers and only six Labour in an Opposition day debate—what a shambles.

I do not question the fact that the NHS faces a significant challenge. Increasing demand for healthcare is a consequence of our ageing and growing population. It is our determination to look after each and every NHS patient with the highest standards of safety and care. These all contribute to the challenge, but, despite increasing pressures, the NHS is rising to meet this challenge, carrying out more than 5,000 operations every day compared with 2010, and handling 780,000 more accident and emergency attendances in the second quarter this year. That is 15.1% more than in the same quarter in the last year that Labour was in office. Today it is the Conservative party that is the party of the NHS. That is why we pledged more than Labour and why we are delivering more funding, with a higher proportion of total Government spending going into health in each year since 2010.

Some hon. Members have drawn international comparisons on spending. I gently remind the more excitable Opposition Members that, according to the OECD, total health spending in the UK for 2014 is 9.9% of GDP, which is 10% above the OECD average of 9% and just above the EU15 average of 9.8%.

Several hon. Members have today also questioned the figures around the rises in funding that we are providing over the term of this Parliament. I welcome confirmation from my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), the Chairman of the Select Committee, that she can see how the Secretary of State arrives at his figures, and she graciously conceded that both sides are correct. I want to focus directly on the straightforward maths.

Dr Wollaston: All I clarified was that the way it had been arrived at is not a way that the public would understand health spending, so I think the Minister is perhaps taking my words out of context, if he will forgive me.

Mr Dunne: We never claimed that we were increasing the Department of Health’s budget; we were talking about the increases to the NHS. For complete clarity, in 2014-15 the NHS budget was £98.1 billion; in 2020-21, it will be £119.9 billion. For Opposition Members who

cannot do the maths, that is a £21.8 billion increase in cash terms to NHS England, or £10 billion in real terms. We promised £8 billion; we are delivering £10 billion.

We also listened to NHS leaders' requests for a front-loaded settlement and delivered on that—it was welcomed by hon. Members in today's debate—with £6 billion of the £10 billion increase coming by the end of this year, including a £3.8 billion real-terms increase in this year alone.

We have also created a £1.8 billion sustainability and transformation fund for the current year to help providers to move to a sustainable financial footing. This fund will mainly be allocated to emergency care provision, which faces some of the greatest demand growth and financial pressures within the system.

This brings me to the next important point I want to address. While more funding is obviously welcomed, hon. Members have drawn attention to rising deficits in the budgets of NHS providers. We recognise that stronger financial management is required to turn this situation around, and we have introduced robust governance arrangements to get things back on track. There are four main elements to this plan: extra investment in the spending review, as I have discussed, and freeing up local government to spend more on adult social care; restoring financial discipline in the short term, through the measures set out by NHS England and NHS Improvement in July, with a wide-ranging set of actions; reducing demand for acute care in the longer term; and driving efficiency and productivity across the provider sector, building on the work of Lord Carter, who has identified large variations in efficiency across non-specialist English acute hospitals, and controlling cost pressures. The need to reduce variations was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) in his very constructive contribution, and by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). We agree that we need to reduce the variability in the poorly performing trusts and bring them up to at least the average standard, if not higher.

We are now beginning to see the first fruits of the plan, with the publication last Friday of the figures for the second quarter deficit, which has been reduced to £648 million, down from £1.6 billion in the same period last year, representing a £968 million improvement. Progress halfway through the financial year is therefore encouraging, but there is no room for complacency. That is why the system needs to stick to its strong financial plan, supported by our investment and by a series of measures set out to help hospitals to become more efficient and to reduce the use of expensive agency staff.

Several hon. Members talked about the sustainability and transformation plans, 28 of which have now been published. The remainder will be published by the end of next month. Half of the Labour Members who spoke in the debate talked specifically about the STP covering Cheshire and Merseyside. It was disappointing that only one of those three Members was able to attend the Westminster Hall debate earlier today in which we discussed conditions in Cheshire and Merseyside. I remind Labour Members that that STP was led by the chief executive of Alder Hey hospital in Liverpool, with whom I would strongly encourage hon. Members who are complaining about a lack of engagement to have a conversation.

Ms Angela Eagle: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: No, I will not. I also remind all Members of the House that any reconfiguration proposals—

Ms Eagle: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. If the Minister is not going to give way, the hon. Lady will have to sit back down.

Ms Eagle: The Minister should not talk about something like this and then refuse to give way.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, it is for the Minister to choose.

Mr Dunne: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I remind all Members of the House that any reconfiguration proposals that emerge from the STPs will be subject to statutory consultation, and I encourage all Members to—

Ms Eagle: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Dunne: I have already said that I will not give way.

I encourage all Members to engage with STP leaders in their area so that they can play their full part in considering how these plans should be taken forward. I remind the House that Chris Ham, the chief executive of the King's Fund—

Ms Eagle *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. If the Minister wishes to give way, he will do so. The bottom line is that the hon. Lady is quite right to ask him if he will do so, but we cannot have people standing up and shouting—[*Interruption.*] We do not want people on one side saying no and people on the other side saying yes. The bottom line is, I want the Minister to get to the end. He may give way if he wishes to; otherwise, he should carry on.

Mr Dunne: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have explained to the hon. Lady that I do not intend to give way to her. I have only a limited amount of time left, and I would like to remind her of what Chris Ham, the chief executive of the King's Fund, said. He regards the STPs as “the best hope to improve health and care services”.

Hon. Members referred to the role of the independent sector in the provision of NHS care. The test for commissioning decisions must always be the value provided for patients and taxpayers, not the type of provider. The vast majority of NHS care has been and will continue to be provided by public sector organisations, but Opposition Members would do well to listen to Stephen Dalton, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, which represents commissioners and providers of NHS services, who wrote today in *The Guardian*, of all papers, that private and wider independent sector health care providers

“increase the system's capacity to respond to demand, help meet waiting time targets and enable investment bring important benefits for patients—most of whom are entirely relaxed over who provides their care, so long as it's of high-quality and remains free at the point of use.”

I entirely agree with him.

[Mr Dunne]

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have acknowledged that the NHS faces challenges, and I recognise concerns raised by many in the House today. As I have made crystal clear, however, this Government are fully committed to the NHS.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

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

The House divided: Ayes 213, Noes 306.

Division No. 95]

[7 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Dowd, Jim
Abrahams, Debbie	Dowd, Peter
Alexander, Heidi	Dromey, Jack
Ali, Rushanara	Dugher, Michael
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Durkan, Mark
Ashworth, Jonathan	Eagle, Ms Angela
Austin, Ian	Eagle, Maria
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Edwards, Jonathan
Beckett, rh Margaret	Efford, Clive
Benn, rh Hilary	Elliott, Julie
Berger, Luciana	Elliott, Tom
Betts, Mr Clive	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Elmore, Chris
Blenkinsop, Tom	Esterson, Bill
Blomfield, Paul	Evans, Chris
Brabin, Tracy	Farrelly, Paul
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Field, rh Frank
Brake, rh Tom	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Brennan, Kevin	Flelo, Robert
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Fletcher, Colleen
Bryant, Chris	Flint, rh Caroline
Buck, Ms Karen	Flynn, Paul
Burgon, Richard	Fovargue, Yvonne
Burnham, rh Andy	Foxcroft, Vicky
Butler, Dawn	Furniss, Gill
Byrne, rh Liam	Gapes, Mike
Cadbury, Ruth	Gardiner, Barry
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Glass, Pat
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Glindon, Mary
Champion, Sarah	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Chapman, Jenny	Goodman, Helen
Ciwyd, rh Ann	Green, Kate
Coaker, Vernon	Greenwood, Margaret
Coffey, Ann	Griffith, Nia
Cooper, Julie	Gwynne, Andrew
Cooper, Rosie	Haigh, Louise
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hamilton, Fabian
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hanson, rh Mr David
Crausby, Mr David	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Creasy, Stella	Harris, Carolyn
Cruddas, Jon	Hayes, Helen
Cryer, John	Healey, rh John
Cunningham, Alex	Hendrick, Mr Mark
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Dakin, Nic	Hermon, Lady
Danczuk, Simon	Hillier, Meg
David, Wayne	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Davies, Geraint	Hollern, Kate
De Piero, Gloria	Hopkins, Kelvin
Debonnaire, Thangam	Howarth, rh Mr George
Doughty, Stephen	Hussain, Imran

Jarvis, Dan	Qureshi, Yasmin
Johnson, rh Alan	Rayner, Angela
Johnson, Diana	Reed, Mr Jamie
Jones, Gerald	Reed, Mr Steve
Jones, Graham	Rees, Christina
Jones, Helen	Reeves, Rachel
Jones, Mr Kevan	Reynolds, Jonathan
Jones, Susan Elan	Rimmer, Marie
Kane, Mike	Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Keeley, Barbara	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Kendall, Liz	Rotheram, Steve
Kinnock, Stephen	Ryan, rh Joan
Kyle, Peter	Saville Roberts, Liz
Lavery, Ian	Shah, Naz
Leslie, Chris	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Sherriff, Paula
Lewis, Clive	Shuker, Mr Gavin
Lewis, Mr Ivan	Siddiq, Tulip
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Lucas, Caroline	Slaughter, Andy
Lucas, Ian C.	Smeeth, Ruth
Lynch, Holly	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Mactaggart, rh Fiona	Smith, Angela
Madders, Justin	Smith, Cat
Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Smith, Nick
Mahmood, Shabana	Smith, Owen
Malhotra, Seema	Spellar, rh Mr John
Mann, John	Starmar, Keir
Marris, Rob	Stevens, Jo
Marsden, Gordon	Streeting, Wes
Maskell, Rachael	Stringer, Graham
Matheson, Christian	Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
McCarthy, Kerry	Tami, Mark
McDonald, Andy	Thomas, Mr Gareth
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair	Thornberry, Emily
McDonnell, rh John	Timms, rh Stephen
McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Trickett, Jon
McGinn, Conor	Turner, Karl
McGovern, Alison	Twigg, Stephen
McInnes, Liz	Umunna, Mr Chuka
McMahon, Jim	Vaz, rh Keith
Mearns, Ian	Vaz, Valerie
Miliband, rh Edward	Watson, Mr Tom
Moon, Mrs Madeleine	West, Catherine
Mulholland, Greg	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Murray, Ian	Williams, Hywel
Nandy, Lisa	Williams, Mr Mark
Onn, Melanie	Wilson, Phil
Onwurah, Chi	Winnick, Mr David
Osamor, Kate	Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
Owen, Albert	Woodcock, John
Pearce, Teresa	Wright, Mr Iain
Perkins, Toby	Zeichner, Daniel
Phillips, Jess	
Phillipson, Bridget	
Pound, Stephen	
Powell, Lucy	
Pugh, John	

Tellers for the Ayes:
Judith Cummins and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel	Baker, Mr Steve
Afriyie, Adam	Baldwin, Harriett
Aldous, Peter	Barclay, Stephen
Allan, Lucy	Barwell, Gavin
Allen, Heidi	Bebb, Guto
Amess, Sir David	Bellingham, Sir Henry
Andrew, Stuart	Benyon, Richard
Ansell, Caroline	Beresford, Sir Paul
Argar, Edward	Berry, Jake
Atkins, Victoria	Berry, James
Bacon, Mr Richard	Bingham, Andrew

Blackman, Bob	Freeman, George	Lee, Dr Phillip	Rudd, rh Amber
Blackwood, Nicola	Fuller, Richard	Lefroy, Jeremy	Rutley, David
Blunt, Crispin	Fysh, Marcus	Leigh, Sir Edward	Sandbach, Antoinette
Boles, Nick	Gale, Sir Roger	Leslie, Charlotte	Scully, Paul
Bone, Mr Peter	Garnier, rh Sir Edward	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Selous, Andrew
Borwick, Victoria	Garnier, Mark	Lewis, rh Brandon	Shannon, Jim
Bradley, rh Karen	Gauke, rh Mr David	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Shapps, rh Grant
Brady, Mr Graham	Ghani, Nusrat	Lidington, rh Mr David	Sharma, Alok
Brazier, Mr Julian	Gibb, Mr Nick	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Shelbrooke, Alec
Bridgen, Andrew	Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl	Lopresti, Jack	Simpson, David
Brokenshire, rh James	Glen, John	Lord, Jonathan	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Bruce, Fiona	Goodwill, Mr Robert	Loughton, Tim	Skidmore, Chris
Buckland, Robert	Gove, rh Michael	Mackinlay, Craig	Smith, Henry
Burns, Conor	Graham, Richard	Mackintosh, David	Smith, Julian
Burns, rh Sir Simon	Grant, Mrs Helen	Main, Mrs Anne	Smith, Royston
Burrowes, Mr David	Gray, Mr James	Mak, Mr Alan	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Burt, rh Alistair	Grayling, rh Chris	Malthouse, Kit	Solloway, Amanda
Cairns, rh Alun	Green, Chris	Mann, Scott	Soubry, rh Anna
Cartlidge, James	Green, rh Damian	Maynard, Paul	Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Cash, Sir William	Greening, rh Justine	McCartney, Karl	Spencer, Mark
Caulfield, Maria	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Stephenson, Andrew
Chalk, Alex	Gummer, rh Ben	McPartland, Stephen	Stevenson, John
Chishti, Rehman	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Menzies, Mark	Stewart, Bob
Chope, Mr Christopher	Halfon, rh Robert	Mercer, Johnny	Stewart, Iain
Churchill, Jo	Hall, Luke	Merriman, Huw	Stewart, Rory
Clark, rh Greg	Hammond, Stephen	Metcalfe, Stephen	Streeter, Mr Gary
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Hands, rh Greg	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stride, Mel
Cleverly, James	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Milling, Amanda	Stuart, Graham
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey	Harrington, Richard	Mills, Nigel	Sturdy, Julian
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Harris, Rebecca	Milton, rh Anne	Sunak, Rishi
Collins, Damian	Hart, Simon	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Colvile, Oliver	Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Mordaunt, Penny	Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Costa, Alberto	Hayes, rh Mr John	Morris, Anne Marie	Syms, Mr Robert
Courts, Robert	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Morris, David	Thomas, Derek
Cox, Mr Geoffrey	Heappey, James	Morris, James	Thrupp, Maggie
Crabb, rh Stephen	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Morton, Wendy	Timpson, Edward
Crouch, Tracey	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Mowat, David	Tomlinson, Justin
Davies, Byron	Henderson, Gordon	Mundell, rh David	Tomlinson, Michael
Davies, Chris	Herbert, rh Nick	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tracey, Craig
Davies, David T. C.	Hinds, Damian	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Tredinnick, David
Davies, Glyn	Hoare, Simon	Neill, Robert	Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Davies, Dr James	Hollingbery, George	Newton, Sarah	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Davies, Mims	Hollinrake, Kevin	Nokes, Caroline	Tugendhat, Tom
Davies, Philip	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Norman, Jesse	Turner, Mr Andrew
Davis, rh Mr David	Holloway, Mr Adam	Nuttall, Mr David	Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Dinenage, Caroline	Hopkins, Kris	Offord, Dr Matthew	Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Howarth, Sir Gerald	Opperman, Guy	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel	Howell, John	Osborne, rh Mr George	Vickers, Martin
Dorries, Nadine	Howlett, Ben	Paisley, Ian	Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Double, Steve	Huddleston, Nigel	Parish, Neil	Walker, Mr Charles
Dowden, Oliver	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Patel, rh Priti	Walker, Mr Robin
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hurd, Mr Nick	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Wallace, Mr Ben
Drax, Richard	Jackson, Mr Stewart	Pawsey, Mark	Warburton, David
Drummond, Mrs Flick	James, Margot	Penning, rh Mike	Warman, Matt
Duddridge, James	Javid, rh Sajid	Penrose, John	Wharton, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Percy, Andrew	Whately, Helen
Dunne, Mr Philip	Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Perry, Claire	Wheeler, Heather
Ellis, Michael	Jenkyns, Andrea	Philp, Chris	White, Chris
Ellison, Jane	Jenrick, Robert	Pickles, rh Sir Eric	Whittaker, Craig
Ellwood, Mr Tobias	Johnson, rh Boris	Pincher, Christopher	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Elphicke, Charlie	Johnson, Gareth	Poulter, Dr Daniel	Wiggin, Bill
Eustice, George	Jones, Andrew	Pow, Rebecca	Williams, Craig
Evans, Graham	Jones, rh Mr David	Prentis, Victoria	Williamson, rh Gavin
Evans, Mr Nigel	Jones, Mr Marcus	Prisk, Mr Mark	Wilson, Mr Rob
Evennett, rh David	Kawczynski, Daniel	Pursglove, Tom	Wilson, Sammy
Fabricant, Michael	Kennedy, Seema	Quin, Jeremy	Wood, Mike
Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Kirby, Simon	Quince, Will	Wright, rh Jeremy
Fernandes, Suella	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Raab, Mr Dominic	Zahawi, Nadhim
Field, rh Mark	Knight, Julian	Redwood, rh John	
Foster, Kevin	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob	
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Lancaster, Mark	Robinson, Mary	
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Latham, Pauline	Rosindell, Andrew	

Tellers for the Noes:
Andrew Griffiths and
Steve Brine

Question accordingly negatived.

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

Question agreed to.

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

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's investment, on the back of a strong economy, of significant additional funding and resources each year for the NHS during the 2015 Parliament; notes that this settlement was frontloaded at the specific request of the NHS in NHS England's own plan to deliver an improved and more sustainable service, the Five Year Forward View; and further notes that the NHS will receive a real terms increase in funding in each year of the Spending Review period, while the Labour Party's Manifesto at the last election committed to only an extra £2.5 billion a year by 2020, far less than the NHS requested.

PETITION

Waste transfer station in Scunthorpe

7.12 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I rise to present the petition of several hundred residents of Scunthorpe county constituency.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of Scunthorpe County Constituency,

Declares that there is strong opposition on the grounds of smell, noise, vermin and pollution to planning application WD/2016/1556 which has been submitted to North Lincolnshire Council proposing to build a waste transfer station on Sunningdale Road, Scunthorpe. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges North Lincolnshire Council to refuse planning application WD/2016/1556, which seeks to build a waste transfer station on Sunningdale Road in Scunthorpe, on the grounds of smell, noise, vermin and pollution.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P001981]

Flooding: River Medway

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

7.14 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is a privilege to be here for my first Adjournment debate on a particularly topical matter: flooding along the River Medway and its tributaries. The recent storm has brought some serious flooding across our country. I am sorry to have to report that some properties have been flooded in Edenbridge in my constituency. I am very grateful to the flood wardens in Edenbridge, Tonbridge and across the community who have done such sterling work not only in warning people about the floods but in ensuring that drains were cleared and culverts were not blocked. That has prevented surface water from becoming a problem.

Surface water and more serious flooding has been an issue for us in Kent in the past, although Kent is rightly recognised as the garden of England and has some of the most beautiful countryside in our land. I am blessed not just to represent it but to live in it. This unites me with all those who live from the coast to the High Weald, whether they are "men of Kent" or "Kentish men"—a distinction based on which side of the Medway they are from and whether they come from Jutish or Anglo-Saxon stock.

The river has shaped much more than just the names of the people. It has carved its way through our history and is reflected in two of the towns that I have the privilege to speak for in this House—Tonbridge, with the Medway running through it, and Edenbridge, with the tributary, the Eden, running through it. Both testify to the importance of the river in our county's life. Further downstream, towns such as Maidstone and Rochester have grown over the centuries as a result of the river providing an important trading link with neighbours. Communities have grown up around the river because of what it offers. The Medway is no different. The flood plains offered fertile fields and later cheap development options with good flat land.

It is no wonder that the history of flooding long pre-dates my time representing this wonderful community, but it has also marked me. Three years ago, just weeks after being selected as the Conservative candidate for the seat of Tonbridge and Malling, I found myself making some of my first visits as a candidate to local villages. Sadly, many were under water. I can vividly remember seeing the impact of floodwater in Hildenborough in January 2014, when I visited with Councillor Mark Rhodes, now the mayor of our wonderful borough council.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend and neighbour on bringing this important debate before the House. As he knows, my constituency was devastated by floodwater in the Christmas floods of 2013, and even now some of those areas are not fully recovered. Does my hon. Friend agree that in addition to everything that the Government are doing in respect of flood defences, they should also earmark funding for the more natural flood defence schemes, such as the four-acre wetlands site in Marden in my constituency, which can hold up to 15 million litres of floodwater? I am sure my hon. Friend is aware that many of these schemes are low cost, low tech and low maintenance, but very effective.

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend and neighbour makes some persuasive points. I shall shortly speak about some local flood defences.

The Brookmead estate and surrounding roads, which I visited with the present mayor, were struggling to recover—as my hon. Friend and neighbour pointed out, some parts are still struggling to recover—from flooding by what to some may sound like a very small amount of water. In many parts it was just over a foot, and sometimes only a foot and a half, of water, but the damage done, even by so little water, can be overwhelming.

That Christmas will not be forgotten by me and, I know, by many residents, some of whom are still struggling to get insurance deals sorted out. Having been elected their MP, I am proud to be here representing them, but I am also conscious that flooding is one of the most pressing issues for me to solve.

The underlying causes of the massive Christmas 2013 flood have not changed significantly in the past three years, unfortunately. We all know that these instances may be getting more frequent. That catchment area flooded severely in 1947, 1958, 1960, 1963, 1974, 1979 and 2000, before the 2013 flood, and these are just the major events. Localised flooding on tributaries can occur much more often.

On Saturday 25 June this year, when many people were either celebrating or mourning the result of the referendum, very few people noticed that homes in Ightham, a beautiful village to the north of the community that I am privileged to represent, were being swamped, following only 33 millimetres of rainfall in just two hours. Busty stream was not able to cope and burst its banks, and the village suffered what the Environment Agency calls a one-in-19-year flood. Today, five months on, many residents are still not back in their homes, and sadly, they are not alone. In Hadlow and East Peckham, recent localised floods on the River Bourne have forced people out of their homes, while in Penshurst, Chiddingstone and Edenbridge, the River Eden has threatened to burst its banks many times since 2013. All these tributaries feed into the River Medway and underline the importance of finding solutions that address the underlying causes of these localised floods without simply passing the problem on to communities further downstream.

Let me take Tonbridge as an example. The new 320-metre flood wall at Avebury Avenue shows a local solution that works. Following restoration of the ground height, 80 homes in the Barden Road area, which were flooded in 2013, are now less at risk from the river. However, the scheme works only because the new walls work in conjunction with existing defences at Leigh and in Tonbridge town centre. Each individual solution must be part of a larger strategy for flood mitigation along the wider catchment.

I recognise that communities in the River Medway catchment are not the only ones in the country that flood. Indeed, we in Kent have great sympathy with the people of Somerset, Yorkshire and Cumbria, who have had their own dreadful floods in recent years, and Government funds to help those communities are welcomed by us, too. Both the larger schemes and the smaller projects, such as the £4 million investment in riverside footpaths in Cumbria, show a Government seeking to address the causes of flooding events. However, every

time there is investment elsewhere, Kent residents rightly consider its effectiveness and ask whether such defences could help in our county, too.

Finding solutions to flooding on the River Medway is important for not just Kent but our country, because so much more depends on it than simply the protection of homes. Yes, our catchment area has 3,000 properties at risk of flooding, half of which are in Tonbridge and Hildenborough, with 500 more in East Peckham, but it is about more than that. Kent is also an economic powerhouse, and many businesses that rely on the ability to operate even in severe weather will be protected should we get the appropriate level of protection.

That is why I support the creation of a Medway flood action plan, which would bring together local authorities, businesses and residents, as happened in Cumbria and Calderdale. Indeed, the Cumbria model, which was well championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), is rightly recognised by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as a central feature of its 25-year environment plan. I hope that success can be mirrored under the banner of a Medway flood partnership. I look forward to its work starting in the new year—it would certainly have my support, and I hope it would have that of the floods Minister, too. Having a flood partnership panel on the horizon would be very popular, as it offers the possibility of a collective solution—one that is cost-effective and that does not cause unnecessary problems elsewhere.

That would support the work already done by the Environment Agency to protect each community and would reinforce the thorough work it has done to demonstrate where the greatest gains can be made. Those inquiries all point in the same direction. It will come as no surprise to the Minister, who is very aware of this issue, that the most viable scheme involves the enlargement of the Leigh flood storage area, the Hildenborough flood alleviation scheme and the East Peckham flood alleviation scheme. That is where resources for capital projects should be directed, with the Government also being clear that property-level resilience should be explored, where feasible, to deal with the 350 properties that may fall outside the effectiveness of those schemes. Where community defence projects are shown by agencies not to be viable, the Government should commit to property-level resilience. The fact that collective defence does not work does not mean that people should be left out. I am told by the Environment Agency that that applies to communities bordering my own.

For my community, however, tomorrow will be the defining moment, as we very much hope to hear from the Chancellor's autumn statement the outcome of local growth fund allocations. I am sure the floods Minister will agree that the bid for the Leigh flood storage area is impressive and compelling, and it would be deeply disappointing to everyone involved were the £4.5 million requested not provided.

This bid is crucial to our community. It has the third largest amount of "other funding" of all the south-east local enterprise partnership region bids. It includes contributions from local businesses in East Peckham, from Kent County Council, from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, and contributions in kind from Southern Water and Tonbridge School. This is a true community project and, with the Environment Agency's commitment of £15.5 million of flood defence grant in aid, a viable

[Tom Tugendhat]

one too. The Environment Agency's contribution is not symbolic. It understands better than anyone that the project would increase capacity at Leigh by 30% while constructing much needed local embankments at Hildenborough and East Peckham. As I mentioned earlier, those projects work in conjunction with each other to improve the wider catchment area. That was why the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, promised Government funding on his visit to the area in the aftermath of the Christmas 2013 floods.

However, there is a wider issue at stake along the River Medway and all its tributaries that goes beyond individual bids through the local growth fund and localised schemes in particular villages—the strategic importance of the Rivers Medway, Eden, Beult, Teise and Bourne to Kent and to the wider south-east region. The Government have been very clear in highlighting the growth that they want to deliver in our part of the country over the coming years, and that depends on investment and people—and, in turn, on viability. This project alone would enable an additional 2,100 homes to be built in sensible locations in an area of predominantly green belt in the south-east of England. It would also deliver over 13 hectares of employment land by 2031, roughly equating to 2,900 associated jobs. The Government targets are rightly ambitious, and to succeed we need to address the creaking infrastructure of the towns and villages nearby. The long-term economic plan, about which we all once heard so much, would focus on these communities to ensure that we have every possible option open to us locally to plan for the future.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council is currently consulting on that future through its local plan, and has shown that without significant investment in local flood defences it will be unable to deliver the growth required by Government. The consequences of a funding shortfall would be severe. Investors would be deterred from coming to the area, new buyers would be priced out of the market due to a lack of supply to keep up with Government demand—or rather popular demand—and current residents would remain at severe risk of flooding. For the cost of a rather modest house in Chelsea, thousands would be left at risk.

Further upstream in Sevenoaks district, the demand for more services in Edenbridge is increasing, yet without additional defences on the River Eden, land will not be available to make these important developments. The doctors' surgery needs more space, as do many in the town of Tonbridge, but their search is severely limited by flood risk in the town. Localised projects that tie in with the collective aim of the catchment could help to solve a variety of problems that our towns and villages face.

I feel it only right to end by referencing the importance of finding solutions to flooding on the River Medway and its tributaries for each individual community involved. A trip upstream from its mouth near the Isle of Grain through Aylesford, Maidstone, East Peckham and Tonbridge will show to all just what a beautiful county Kent is. It will also demonstrate the reliance that each of the communities places on the river, and how economic and cultural links have been forged by the connections it provides. Each of its tributaries, from the Beult and Teise to the east, to the Bourne to the north and the Eden to the west, have seen communities built around

them. They no longer feed the tanner's yard and the cricket ball factories, but they are still at the heart of our life. It is crucial that this Government make their contribution to ensuring that Kent has the ability to grow and to deliver its plans in the region. That is important not only for the Government but, most of all, for the people of Kent. The work has been done and the options are now present for each town and village. Some will require larger capital schemes, while others will require property level resilience to deliver the appropriate outcome. Each has its place.

Christmas 2013 is still in my mind, and I know just how much of an impact it has had on many others who lived through that night and the past three years. We all know that it could happen again at any time. I hope that the Government will do their bit so that next time we flood—sadly, I fear it will be next time, rather than never—the impact is limited and the people who have made their lives and businesses in west Kent are able to do so in the security of the appropriate flood defences.

7.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) on securing this debate on flooding on the River Medway and its tributaries. He spoke passionately on behalf of his constituents, and I congratulate him on securing his first Adjournment debate in the Chamber; I think this is also my first reply to an Adjournment debate in the Chamber.

I am very aware of the impact of flooding. I have supported my constituents in Suffolk following flooding in recent years, and I understand the impact it can have on people's homes, businesses and livelihoods. I am committed to doing my utmost to raise awareness of, and to reduce, flood risk. My hon. Friend referred to the Edenbridge flooding today, and he praised flood wardens. I absolutely congratulate them on coming forward, and I thank the Environment Agency for working with Kent County Council in training those wardens. I am also pleased to hear of the preparations that were made to try to alleviate the risk of flooding today.

The Government continue to play a key role in improving protection for those at flood risk. We are spending £2.5 billion on 1,500 new flood defence schemes to improve protection for 300,000 homes by 2021, and we have increased maintenance spending in real terms over this Parliament to more than £1 billion. I understand that we have also spent £825,000 on the River Medway on maintenance in the last year; that is the highest it has been for some time. Moving to a six-year settlement has given the Environment Agency greater certainty on schemes and has made it easier to protect more homes, in contrast with the hand-to-mouth existence that arose from the previous annual settlement.

Mrs Helen Grant: The Minister is talking about funding. I wonder whether she thinks, as I do, that the Chancellor's autumn statement tomorrow may be the perfect opportunity for the Government to turn their very wise and warm words about innovative flood measures into reality at last.

Dr Coffey: The plans that people at the Environment Agency are working on with DEFRA, which include potential developments on natural management schemes,

are exactly the kind of initiatives that I hope might get highlighted in the autumn statement. Nevertheless, we will all have to wait and see.

In the catchment area of the River Medway more than 3,000 properties are at risk of flooding, including 1,500 homes in Tonbridge and Hildenborough and 500 in East Peckham. During the winter 2013-14 floods, more than 900 homes and businesses in Tonbridge, East Peckham, Maidstone, Yalding and other smaller communities were flooded from the River Medway and its tributaries. This flood was the largest ever measured in many parts of the catchment of the River Medway. The Leigh flood storage area is situated upstream of Tonbridge and currently protects 1,200 homes and businesses from flooding. Although the Leigh flood storage area already plays a vital role in protecting those properties, the Environment Agency has also been working in partnership with the local community to improve the level of protection.

I wrote to my hon. Friends in August this year with an update on the work to reduce flood risk on the Medway, and I assured them that we remained committed to working in partnership to provide a scheme that will further reduce the flood risk to local communities. The Environment Agency has been working in partnership with local councils to find the most effective way to reduce flood risk for communities along the Rivers Medway, Beult and Teise. This work included an initial cost-benefit assessment of various options. In April 2014 those partners committed £1 million to fund the development of a business case for the schemes. That work included carrying out more detailed modelling of the Medway catchment.

Currently, the Environment Agency, Kent County Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council are progressing the business case for enlarging the Leigh flood storage area and the Hildenborough embankment. I am aware that that is the favoured option for improving flood protection to homes and businesses in Tonbridge and Hildenborough, because together they will provide additional storage capacity that will benefit more than 1,400 properties. The project to enlarge the Leigh flood storage area and to build embankments is estimated to cost £17.1 million. The scheme qualifies for around £11.3 million of grant in aid, with a further £5.8 million of partnership funding contributions required. Work is also ongoing on plans for the East Peckham flood alleviation scheme, which involves constructing walls and embankments to protect some 560 homes and businesses. The scheme costs £7.5 million and requires £3.25 million of partnership funding contributions, which are being sought, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling described, from the South East local enterprise partnership and from local businesses that will benefit.

I am pleased that local partners are already working together to contribute to these schemes, alongside the considerable Government investment, and work is continuing to bridge the current funding gap. I should remind the House that it was under a Conservative-led Government that we changed the funding policy to give every scheme that had a positive benefit-cost ratio a chance to secure some grant funding, rather than the old system of all or nothing.

The Environment Agency is also scoping how it can work with partners to develop a Medway flood action plan, modelled on the successful integrated catchment

planning approach of the Cumbria flood action plan. I am very pleased to hear that my hon. Friend is looking forward to participating in that process, and that the newly established Medway flood partnership will have its first meeting in the new year.

In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), I understand that natural flood management options will be considered for the action plan. Where schemes meet the objectives to which she referred, about the potential reduction in flooding, with economic benefits, such an option is already given to farmers. There are several schemes for which that is the case, although, admittedly, I believe that there is little such opportunity in Yalding.

This debate allows me to highlight what we are doing on a broader level to improve resilience and to be better prepared for whatever arises this winter. No Government can promise that no one will be flooded ever again, but we can learn and act. That is what we did with the national flood resilience review. The review was undertaken to assess how the country can be better protected from future flooding and extreme weather events. I can report that considerable progress has been made to help to prepare for future flood events. We have invested £12.5 million in mobile flood defences, which means that the Environment Agency now has 25 miles of such temporary defences, located in seven key areas, which are available to be deployed flexibly around the country, compared with the five miles that was available last year. We also have 500,000 sandbags ready. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced, 1,200 troops are on standby if the worst comes to the worst and councils need their help.

Infrastructure providers have been reviewing the resilience of key assets that provide vital services to our communities. They are identifying where they can also protect these assets with temporary defences this winter, while longer-term solutions are implemented. This means that the country will be better protected this winter, and services to our communities will be more resilient to flood events. We have also worked with the private sector to develop a new property flood resilience action plan, which illustrates some straightforward measures that homeowners and businesses can take to improve the resilience of their property to flooding, as well as enabling them to get back in far more quickly if, unfortunately, they are flooded. These can be simple measures, such as in-built airbrick covers, to more substantial works, such as installing a pump, having solid floors or installing wiring so that plug sockets are higher up the wall.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald is in the Chamber, I thought it would be helpful to refer to the flooding that happened in her community. I recognise that, unfortunately, flooding in this area is a frequent occurrence. An event leading to flood depths of more than 1 metre occurs roughly every 10 years in Yalding. The communities of Yalding and Collier Street sit at the confluence of the Rivers Beult, Teise and Medway, which makes the flood risk there particularly challenging. The communities could be flooded by any or all of the rivers.

I am aware that although the Leigh flood storage area helps to reduce downstream water levels on the River Medway, it offers only a marginal benefit because it is 10 miles upstream. Given the local geography and topology, as well as existing developments within the

[Dr Thérèse Coffey]

catchment area, flood storage areas constructed on the Rivers Beult and Teise would not be sufficiently large to make a meaningful difference to flood levels in areas such as Yalding and the surrounding communities. That is simply not possible.

The Environment Agency now has a dedicated project manager working with the councils in Yalding and Collier Street to make progress in making properties and infrastructure more resilient to flooding. Early estimates suggest that approximately 350 houses may benefit from such property-level resilience. I am pleased that the Environment Agency will begin detailed surveys of each property in early 2017, and I, too, look forward to hearing the outcome.

The Environment Agency will continue to work with my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling

to reduce flood risk in the area and will continue to work collaboratively to deliver projects in this part of west Kent. I assure you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I have listened to all the comments that have been made today and that the Government will continue to ensure that we are always as well protected from flooding as possible.

Finally, as has been referred to extensively, the autumn statement is tomorrow and there will be forthcoming announcements about LEP funding. If anything changes as a result of those announcements, I will be happy to update my hon. Friend again. Of course, he does have Question 1 at oral questions to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on Thursday, when he may talk about flooding.

Question put and agreed to.

7.40 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 22 November 2016

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

South-west Growth Charter

9.30 am

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Once we have heard the opening speech, I will indicate whether it is necessary to impose a time limit. Nine Members are seeking to take part in the debate, so we are probably looking at around five minutes each.

9.31 am

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the South West Charter for Growth.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger—[*Interruption.*] That is a ringing endorsement. I am delighted to have secured this opportunity to bring to Westminster the campaign for the south-west to be seen as a centre for growth. The business community in the south-west is serious about introducing a framework for growth and economic prosperity in our important and much-loved region, which is what we are here to debate today.

We do not come to the Government with a begging bowl; we come to say that this is what the south-west business community plans to do for our region. The charter is not the brainchild of local authorities, politicians or quangos; it is the voice of business expressing its positive commitment to our region and saying to Whitehall, “This is what we will do. Now, Government, please do the part that only Governments can really do, namely infrastructure. Give us the tools to do the job.”

First, how do we define the south-west for the purpose of this debate? The Government usually describe the south-west as the seven counties from Land’s End to Gloucester, including Bristol and Stonehenge—a wide and disparate area. Not so today: the south-west for the purpose of this debate, the summit and the charter is primarily Cornwall, of course including the Isles of Scilly—I would not want to leave them out—Devon and most of Somerset, excluding the unitary authorities to the north. In other words, we are discussing the territory of the two local enterprise partnership regions of Cornwall and Isles of Scilly and the Heart of the South West.

The charter we are presenting the Government today builds on a growth summit held at the University of Exeter on Friday 21 October 2016. The summit was the initiative of one of the largest private-sector employers in our region, Pennon Group—the owner of South West Water, Bournemouth Water and Viridor—in partnership with the *Western Morning News*, a great champion of our region. The summit brought together the main economic interests of the south-west, alongside many of the region’s Members of Parliament. I am delighted that so many of my colleagues from Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, and from both sides of the House,

are here today. The Opposition Members for our region are a tad depleted these days, but what Labour lacks in quantity the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) more than makes up for in quality. I am delighted to see him here today.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): You won’t say that after my speech.

Mr Streeter: I probably won’t. I have never agreed with a single word the right hon. Gentleman has said.

The south-west growth charter calls for a new partnership between the south-west and central Government to achieve the goals agreed at the summit, which was attended by more than 200 people, more than 40 businesses, the CBI, the region’s two local enterprise partnerships, academic institutions and 14 local authorities from across the region. The summit was addressed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who made an excellent speech that I know the Minister will replicate today. The Minister is a champion for progress, growth and prosperity. Indeed, he oozes them from every pore.

Despite our many successes and the beauty of our region, the south-west has not known the investment and prosperity of other parts of the United Kingdom in recent times—it falls below even the European Union average. What is more, the region has not always made itself heard with a clear, unified voice at Westminster, but we are open for business. We are looking for growth, and we want to build on the success of the northern powerhouse and the midlands engine. Today, we are setting out a positive vision for the south-west region.

The summit and the wider “Back the South West” campaign have shown a clear, unified business voice outlining a vision for the economic future of Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. The campaign has captured imaginations across our region and is a positive initiative from business, with strong support from local media. I always find that quoting local newspapers is a good way of getting in the local newspapers, and the front page of the *Western Morning News* on 3 October 2016 said:

“Clean beaches, sparkling seas and fresh air. The South West has it all. But while the natural beauty of the region is incomparable, its economy too often lags behind...given the tools, the South West can really fly”.

That is what this debate is all about.

A key part of the “Back the South West” campaign has been about creating a south-west narrative and speaking passionately at national level about why the south-west region is a wonderful place to live, work and do business. We are all immensely proud of our region, but we face challenges, particularly in light of the forthcoming Brexit. The local enterprise partnerships in our region are already showing how well they can work together to address those challenges and take opportunities.

Infrastructure investment needs and connectivity improvements were the overriding themes of the summit. To paraphrase a politician from years ago, we want to talk about three key things today: infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure. I remember going to India a few years ago with some Indian businesspeople, and they talked about the creativity of their people and all the resources and energy in that fabulous country. After the monsoons, they showed me roads that had been swept away and told me, “This is what holds us back in

[Mr Streeter]

India. It is the infrastructure that we simply can't manage to put in place." I could say exactly the same thing about our region. All the creativity, the energy and the skills are there, but we need the infrastructure to get the job done.

We are all aware of the historical challenges in the south-west in relation to traditional infrastructure. For most of us, the key issue is the vital rail links to London and the rest of the country.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I am delighted that my hon. Friend has secured this debate. We can do much more on the second rail link between Waterloo and Exeter to increase the number of trains and to add more loops so that we can get many more trains through to Exeter and further down into the west country. I would like a junction connecting the rail link to the trams at Seaton.

Mr Streeter: My hon. Friend is a powerful advocate for his region, and I know he speaks to the Government. I am sure he knows that, by sheer coincidence, the Peninsula Rail Task Force's 20-year plan will be launched at 11 o'clock this morning. The plan will spell out the improvement we seek to our rail infrastructure, and it will include the measures he mentions to equip our region for the 21st century.

Road and air transport are critical too, but it is not only about traditional infrastructure; it is also about wider connectivity. Big strides have been taken as part of the Government's push to increase digital connectivity, but more needs to be done. As Bill Martin, the editor of the *Western Morning News*, has said, the south-west is known as

"the region where every telephone conversation ends with the word 'hello'."

Digital connectivity is more important than ever in this 21st-century world, so making a success of the digitally enabled economy is critical, particularly for our region where peripherality is our challenge and connectivity is the solution. Now that people can do anything from anywhere and now that we have excellent universities in our region, connecting ourselves will continue to make us the most attractive and wonderful place to live, work and raise a family.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend enormously for securing this important debate. Encompassing everything, does he agree that the south-west has been very much neglected and left out? The Government ignore us at their peril, because we could be a powerhouse not just for ourselves but for the country.

Mr Streeter: There is no question in my mind but that we have not seen the investment that we might have wanted from Governments of all colours over many years, particularly over the past 30 years. Now that we have come together to speak with a single powerful voice, I believe we will see that change. The Government are listening to us.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On connectivity, the south-west can benefit from connectivity with the rest of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, and Northern Ireland can also gain from connectivity

with the south-west. There are potential advantages for both, including in the agri-food industries, fishing and tourism. Those are three things that we could do together. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is how we should do it?

Mr Streeter: We are delighted to work with anyone, and we are always delighted to welcome tourists from Northern Ireland who come to enjoy our wonderful south-west.

The Government need to recognise that European funding has contributed greatly to digital infrastructure in the past, and that a home-grown solution must be provided for the future. We need 5G. Tourism has been a key part of the local economy for many years, but it has also meant a lot of low-paid jobs. We in the south-west have core strengths. We are home to world-class universities including Exeter, Plymouth and Falmouth, and to highly skilled workers. Our response has been for businesses, local leaders and academic institutions to create successful business clusters and networks, such as marine around Plymouth, environment around Exeter, and aerospace and defence around Newquay. The clusters have played a key part in the hundreds of thousands of growing businesses across the aerospace, marine, technology and creative industries, helping the region attract and retain talent. However, we need to do more, and we need the infrastructure to support that growth.

We in the south-west have proved that we are successful. Pennon Group, which has taken the lead on the excellent charter, is born of the south-west and headquartered there, and operates across the whole region, in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and now Dorset. It is one of the UK's largest listed companies. There are many other success stories, and no doubt some of my hon. Friends will mention them in a moment.

One of the Secretary of State's key messages at the summit was about devolution. I will touch on that, and I think that one or two other Members might want to mention it as well. He made it clear that if the south-west wants an ambitious devolution deal, it must accept a directly elected mayor. His argument was that in other countries in the G7, large regions, particularly around big cities, have a lot more power than we in Britain have traditionally given to regions. Too many decisions in Britain are still made in Westminster when they should be made at local level, but local power is often too fragmented. To make sensible decisions on transport, skills and infrastructure, he argued, we need much more joined-up thinking and a proper combined authority, with one elected person shouldering the accountability.

That has given our region food for thought, and discussions are ongoing, but it seems clear that if we want the devolution deal that the region needs and deserves, we must find a way to deliver a western super-mayor, a strategic leader—[*Laughter.*] Do you see what I did there? I have been working on that all night. Perhaps it is time we came together to do so. It is what the business community wants. However, there will be different views, and the conversation is ongoing.

The charter that we will deliver to Downing Street later today is not about going cap in hand to the Government; it is about saying that we in the south-west can do an awful lot for ourselves, but we need infrastructure support. The charter supports the Government's industrial

strategy and sets out how the Government can work with the south-west to increase investment and opportunities for people of all ages.

In the charter, the business community outlines its commitments to the region: to collaborate for growth; to invest in a self-sustaining south-west; to invest in innovation, industry and infrastructure; to invest in productive people and retain talent within our region; to invest in our environment and share the benefits of growth. What do we want the Government to do? We want a new Government partnership with the south-west, a firm focus on south-west growth in the Government's industrial strategy and a funding road map so that the south-west can move from funding reliance to more innovative funding solutions.

We want investment in digital connectivity: ultrafast south-west, a new partnership with the private sector to deliver ultrafast south-west 5G mobile, fibre and wireless broadband to 90% of the population by 2030. We want investment in energy connectivity—switching on to opportunity—to address transmission and distribution restrictions on regional growth, to be completed by 2025, and a renewed focus by Ofgem, National Grid and Western Power Distribution. Crucially, we want investment in transport connectivity to get business moving. We want Government to back the Peninsula Rail Task Force's long-term plan for rail improvements, which will be outlined in the report published later today, and to re-affirm commitments to road improvement projects in the pipeline, including the A303, the A30, the A38 and, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) would undoubtedly agree, the A358.

As Chris Loughlin, chief executive of Pennon, said at the south-west growth summit:

“We should be able to get our voice heard. We are, after all, a political battleground. Elections are won and lost on how the south-west votes.”

On that, we all agree.

The south-west charter will be delivered to Downing Street later today. The timing could not be better: it is the day before the autumn statement. The south-west has made a profound contribution to this country throughout our history, and we have some very successful businesses in the region. It is a charter for growth; more than that, it is a charter for aspiration and hope for all in the south-west, but particularly the younger generation. Tomorrow, we will look to the Chancellor to re-commit to the south-west. Leaving the EU creates uncertainty, but also opportunity. The south-west is ready to deliver in the new partnership with the Government, provided that we receive the right commitments. That is the challenge for the Minister in this debate. Hinkley Point C, the third runway at Heathrow and High Speed 2 will all have a positive impact on the south-west, but we need more, and we need more infrastructure commitments specifically for the south-west.

It is not just about the autumn statement tomorrow; we are not going away. We will look to future budgets and the UK's industrial strategy to position the south-west where it should be: not on the fringes, but at the centre of growth. Our two local enterprise partnerships are working hard together already, with valuable input from the business community, led by Pennon, to ensure that our proposals are developed. We need to add Government to that partnership.

To quote the *Western Morning News* for the third time—

Neil Parish: You should get quoted now.

Mr Streeter: It is a sure-fire thing. The *Western Morning News* said in its editorial last week:

“The government listens to those who speak loudly and logically and can make a good case. Too often, parts of the West Country have seemed to be pulling in different directions. Faced with petty rivalries, it has been easy for Ministers to dismiss the needs of our region and divert funds and support elsewhere.”

Not today. Here, the south-west is speaking with a united voice, led by the region's business community and with far wider support from MPs and many in local government. There is clear momentum behind the campaign. I am delighted to throw my weight behind it, as are my colleagues from across Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, from both sides of this House. Together, we will raise south-west growth up the Government's agenda and secure our region's place in the new industrial strategy.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Looking around the room at the number of Members who wish to speak, I reckon that given 10 minutes for each of the Front-Bench speakers and a couple of minutes for Mr Streeter to wind up the debate, we probably have about four minutes a head. I do not normally do this, but I will on this occasion, because this debate has clearly and rightly attracted a lot of interest from south-west Members of Parliament: I will give the list and batting order. Mr Bradshaw will speak for the Opposition next. After that, we have Oliver Colville, Johnny Mercer, James Heapey, Kevin Foster, Sir Hugo Swire, Peter Heaton-Jones, Anne-Marie Morris and Rebecca Pow. I will not impose a time limit; I will impose a self-denying ordinance, on the understanding that those at the end may drop off the list if other colleagues are too greedy.

9.48 am

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I will try to adhere to that advice, Sir Roger, but as I am the sole Opposition MP in the region that we are discussing, it will be a challenge. I congratulate the hon. Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter) on securing this debate, which as he said is timely because the autumn statement is tomorrow, and because once again, overnight, the south-west railway has been cut off by flooding.

I do not think that anyone can criticise the document that we are debating. It is an excellent document, and no one could find fault with it. However, the regular loss of our connectivity, which has happened yet again in the last 24 hours, is a more accurate reflection of the current reality on the ground than the vision that the charter rightly sets out for the future of the south-west. As the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) said in an intervention, the reality is that we in the south-west feel neglected. When we look at all the investment going into London with Crossrail, the north of England with high-speed rail and all the other massive, multi-billion-pound infrastructure investments, we in the south-west feel like the poor relations. The electrification of the railway line to Bristol and south Wales has now been delayed, and even that will not come down to our part of the region, which needs it just as much.

[Mr Ben Bradshaw]

We all remember the grandiose promises made before the last election. We could not move in the south-west, particularly after the Cornish rail collapse, for visiting Prime Ministers, Chancellors and Ministers promising £20 billion of investment in infrastructure in this Parliament. I remember the then Prime Minister saying that he would do whatever it took to put our infrastructure in a good condition, but we have seen very little of that investment so far. Some might even argue that those promises and all those visits helped to sweep an almost full house of Conservative MPs to power in our region, with Exeter the only surviving constituency with Opposition representation. My Conservative colleagues have a big responsibility. If I may give them a little gentle advice, at some stage they will have to play hardball with the Government and demand that the promises made to them before the election are actually fulfilled.

Rail infrastructure is not the only problem. The hon. Member for South West Devon has already mentioned broadband; our broadband roll-out in Devon and Somerset is badly behind schedule and the way it has been handled has been an absolute shambles. Broadband is vital in rural areas, particularly for our small and medium-sized enterprises. There is also an awful lot of uncertainty, as the hon. Gentleman said, about Brexit—particularly in Cornwall, given Cornwall's reliance on huge economic support from the European Union. Sectors in our region such as farming and fisheries, which are disproportionately involved and engaged in importing and exporting within the single market, face big uncertainties. Our higher education sector is very dependent on the free movement of students and academics and on all the investment that our membership of the European Union brings. All that uncertainty, combined with historic under-investment in infrastructure, raises real concerns in our region.

To add insult to injury, we have learned that our local enterprise partnership in Devon and Somerset—Heart of the South West, which the hon. Member for South West Devon mentioned—has been told that it can expect only a tiny fraction of the money that it had originally hoped to receive in the next round of development support grants. That led to an unprecedented letter, which we all signed last week, to ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to think again—I cannot remember another time when every single MP in Devon and Somerset signed such a letter. As the hon. Gentleman said, it seems to be something to do with the fact that we do not have an elected mayor model; we also have a shortage of big businesses to match-fund the Government money. That is stating the bleeding obvious, because our region's strength is our small and medium-sized enterprises. We have some excellent big companies, but we do not have the large number of big companies that a northern powerhouse, or whatever, has.

I very much hope that the Chancellor's autumn statement tomorrow will reflect some of the serious concerns expressed in this debate. I also hope that the Communities Secretary will look very carefully at our letter, because there is a lot of anger about how we in the south-west have been treated, and that anger will only get worse if our next growth funding deal is even worse than we expected or is a lot worse than the previous two. I congratulate

the hon. Member for South West Devon again on securing the debate; it is well overdue, and I hope the Government are listening. Our region must get the investment that it needs. Sadly, that has been symbolised again in the last 24 hours by its being cut off by flooding.

9.53 am

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak in this timely debate on the south-west regional growth fund, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter) on securing it.

I have been Member of Parliament for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport for the last six and a half years. Uniquely for a Conservative constituency, it is an inner-city seat without a piece of countryside—all we have is the Ponderosa pony sanctuary and a rather muddy field. Although it has a low-wage and low-skills economy, it has a global reputation for marine science engineering research, a huge science base, two dynamic and expanding universities with more than 30,000 students and a very fine art college. I am grateful to the Government for the investment that Ministers have put into Plymouth, including the city deal in South Yard, which has also been turned into an enterprise zone. That city deal initiative will turn underused land in the dockyard into a marine industrial production campus, which will ensure that we can help the Government to deliver their industrial strategy and realise our full economic potential.

Although Plymouth's economic future looks bright, it needs real help to develop its skills base and to improve its transport infrastructure connections. Earlier this autumn, the Ministry of Defence announced that the Royal Marines would be moved from Arbroath, Taunton and Chivenor. In 2020, Plymouth will host the commemorations for Mayflower 400, to celebrate the Mayflower ship leaving to found the American colonies—we might seek to invite the President to pay a visit to Plymouth, to see for himself how wonderful it is. Mayflower 400 will provide a unique opportunity for us to run a spectacular trade fair, just months after the UK withdraws from the European Union, but Plymouth and the surrounding area will need significantly improved train and road infrastructure to deliver that. The Government are reviewing the viability of reopening Plymouth City airport, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). Later today, we will launch the Peninsula Rail Task Force report on the future of a sustainable railway line from the west country to London and the west midlands. There is also a proposal to convert the A303 and the A358 to dual carriageways.

The two local enterprise partnerships that affect Plymouth have submitted growth deal applications to continue the development of the South Yard city deal, which will create 1,500 new jobs, and the redevelopment of the railway station in my constituency. The latter is vital, because it will ensure that when American tourists visit the place that the founding fathers left from in 1620, they arrive in a dynamic city. By providing the necessary funds for the development of the railway station, the Government will help our local tourist industry; ensure that the increasing number of Royal Marines and Royal Navy sailors based in the Plymouth travel-to-work area arrive in a modern, up-to-date facility; remain good to

their word by investing in modern infrastructure; support previous investments; and demonstrate that the people of Plymouth were right to elect a Conservative Government who deliver for the country and the south-west, which is playing its part in economic growth.

9.57 am

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak in this debate, Sir Roger. I would pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter) for securing it, but time is short.

This debate is of supreme importance. I am afraid that I am going to use Plymouth as an example for the wider south-west. We all talk about investment in the south-west, but I want to put a bit of meat on the bones with some data and statistics. I know that statistics are frightening for some, but they are important.

Plymouth, like the rest of the south-west, is not talked about enough in this place, and the effects of that are clear to see. It was once an industrial powerhouse, centred on the dockyard, where tens of thousands of workers, welders, fabricators, shipbuilders and union shop stewards contributed more to the nation's security and heritage than Plymouth is ever credited with. The military commitment, although diminished in numbers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) indicated, continues to this day—but Plymouth has always been much more than a military city. The harbour was used by merchant sailors for trade routes to London and all over the world, and transatlantic liners used to depart from Millbay.

There is a feeling in the streets and communities of Plymouth today that should be expressed in this place, which is that as the nature of the modern economy has changed and the nation's focus on defence, rightly or wrongly, has declined, Plymouth has been forgotten—discarded after use. I therefore welcome the south-west growth charter, which lights a path back to a vision of better things. Hon. Members will all speak on different parts of it; in my short time, I will highlight infrastructure and Government spend in the south-west.

There is no doubt that infrastructure is the catalyst for growth. Regions in transition need a fair deal from the Government in all sectors. Every city's representatives can come to Westminster and have a moan at the Government, but I want to put some evidence on record. I know that London is different, but the transport spend in Plymouth is £219 per head, compared with £1,869 in London. The public health spend is £47 per head, compared with a national average of £63. Despite being the most deprived area in the south-west, Plymouth is also the most underfunded. Why is so much less being spent on Plymothians? It is just not acceptable.

I am going to be slightly controversial, because I have my own views on why all that has happened. I know that all my colleagues agree that one of our main jobs in this place is to make the Government work for our constituents at the personal and local level. I have my own views on how well that has been done in the past. Locally, I never cease to be surprised by the elected officials in Plymouth; the manner in which they carry on contrasts sharply with the professionalism of the council staff, who work so hard for Plymouth.

One might say that as elected officials, elections are our appraisals from our bosses—the people. For many years now, at every election, local or national, the largest party has not been Labour or the Conservatives, or even the Lib Dems; it has always been the “don't cares”—those who do not vote. The time for blaming those people for not voting has passed. It is time that we turned that argument on its head and recognised that we have to give people something to vote for, not chastise them for their lack of interest in us. Plymouth is an ambitious city, with gifted, ingenious people who can adapt to change like those in any other city, but Governments of all colours have simply not delivered for too many in our city, as evidenced in our elections.

That has to change, so what do we do? We have a unique opportunity in this Parliament: almost the entire region is represented by the Government party. The biggest, most determining factor in economic growth for a region far from economic engines such as London is transport links to enable big companies to get in and out of our region, thereby providing the skilled jobs and professional development that our ambitious and talented people deserve. We cannot, as a cohort, continue to support the Government unequivocally without genuine “spade in the ground” investment in our transport infrastructure. It is unacceptable for a region so large, diverse and productive as ours to be expected to survive on the rail link we currently have, irrespective of the Government's plans elsewhere. I strongly congratulate the peninsula Rail Task Force on its report into rectifying the situation. I urge the Prime Minister and her team to read it very carefully indeed before committing to further investment elsewhere in the country.

Politics is a team game, and it works both ways—not only from us to the Government but from the Government to us. I support the Prime Minister in everything she does, as do my colleagues, but our commitment to making the Government work for people in the south-west must trump everything else. I firmly believe that this Conservative Government have done more for our region of late than has ever been done before, but we must let it be known that if the line is crossed we will hold firm and hold together as a cohort to put our region first; otherwise, we will continue the degradation of politics that we are all so keen to avoid.

It is not all bad by any stretch. The jobs lag from a dockyard that employed 35,000 workers in its heyday, but employs 3,500 today, has been filled by enterprising, determined Plymothians who have created a buzzing local economy that just needs a bit more help from central Government. Similarly, when it comes to central Government there can be no doubt that the single biggest factor in improving the life chances of our constituents is a job, and under this Government unemployment has halved since 2010. But we must not take our foot off the gas. The south-west growth agenda is key to our prosperity.

10.2 am

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter) on securing this important debate.

There are six networks that drive productivity, not only in our region but nationally, and they are the air, road, rail, broadband, mobile and energy networks. I

[James Heapey]

am afraid that in the south-west there is under-investment in them all. Bristol airport, which serves the region, has been growing at a great pace in recent years, but we need to ensure that it is better connected southwards so that it can serve the region that it is intended to serve.

Road improvements are coming along nicely, but the work on the A303 and the A358 needs to happen with some urgency. We must also be aware that, as we do that work, we risk making Somerset the rock in the stream, around which the M4 and M5 to our north and west, and the A303 and A358 to our south, move quickly while Somerset remains disconnected.

I encourage the Minister to support the work of my hon. Friends the Members for Bath (Ben Howlett) and for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who are campaigning for better access to north-east Somerset from the M4 to improve connectivity in the north-east of the region, and the ongoing work to support Hinkley Point by improving junction 23 of the M5 to allow better connectivity not only to Hinkley Point but into Mendip. We must ensure that, as we improve the main roads in our region, we do not simply make Somerset the unconnected rock in the stream around which everything moves quickly.

Yesterday, our region was once again cut off. The railway line between Bristol and Taunton was under water, causing huge disruption, not only for Members of Parliament returning to the House after the weekend but for the region as a whole, which feels awfully remote when water is on the tracks and nobody can get to us. It was Dawlish before; yesterday, it was the line through Somerset.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) is leading a debate in Westminster Hall this afternoon on the electrification of the great western railway to Bristol Temple Meads, so I shall not go into that now, other than to say that it is of course not just the electrification of those last eight miles between Bath Spa and Bristol Temple Meads that affects our region so much. Electrification is required in the Thames valley to release the rolling stock that is supposed to come from the Thames valley to serve the Bristol and Bath commuter network, which will in turn release the rolling stock that is supposed to go down to Devon and Cornwall to serve the Plymouth and Exeter networks. The delay to electrification has a real effect, not only in the west country but in the Thames valley. It is needed to increase capacity for commuters in our region. Most of all, it is a shame that the electrification of the great western railway, which we as a region thought was in the bag, now finds itself in competition with the excellent work of the Peninsula Rail Task Force.

On broadband and mobile, I absolutely agree with the growth charter that says that we must go for 90% connectivity by fibre for premises and that we should go for 5G. Let us not forget, though, that right now more than 10% of Devon and Somerset do not have access to a superfast connection at all, and much of the region has connection speeds that are down around 2 Mbps or less. Our mobile phone connectivity is improving, but there are still far too many not spots, so there is work to be done before we embark on the more ambitious targets for the future.

We are a decentralised region with no obvious economic focal point, so it follows that there is no obvious focus for energy generation. I think that, as a region, we are the nation's leader in the deployment of renewables, but we require real investment in our distribution and transmission systems to support that sort of energy system. The Minister should take note that there is also an opportunity for renewable energy, clean tech and new nuclear to be part of the industrial strategy for the south-west.

The south-west has a great deal to offer, with great universities, including the University of Bristol, the University of the West of England, the University of Bath and Bath Spa University, and great expertise, ambition and potential. We just need to be better connected by air, road, rail, fibre, mobile and electricity wire.

10.7 am

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter) on securing the debate. It is a perfect day for this debate—a day when we again see pictures of hanging tracks in the south-west, demonstrating how important links have been cut off. It is a delicious irony that members of the Peninsula Rail Task Force, which has been referred to a lot, had to drive to Reading last night in order to get here to present a report on rail resilience. Why did they have to drive to Reading? Because of a lack of rail resilience. On top of that, my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) and I had charming experiences yesterday: I had an 11-hour journey from Torquay to the House, and his journey was significantly longer.

We could make the debate all about rather negative descriptions of the well-known issues with our transport network, but we could also be positive about the opportunities available and what is already going on. On Thursday last week, the *Western Morning News* published an opinion piece on how the south-west should unite to build on a charter for investment and infrastructure. On the very same page there were details of the work being done by four local colleges that have come together to expand their opportunities and help to support tech businesses. The article, written by the principal of South Devon College, Stephen Criddle, gives details of the world-class high-tech and digital innovation centre being created for the photonics industry, which has a long history in Torbay.

Before I address what I think the Government should be doing, it is important to look at what we can do ourselves. We clearly need to ensure we have the skills for businesses, because there is little point in creating jobs and opportunities if we do not have people with the skills—particularly in science, technology, engineering and maths—to take them up. There are also well-known shortages of skills and professionals in our health and social care industries. We need to look at what can be done at local authority level. I welcome the fact that my local council has put £50 million into a growth fund. I must say it makes the £15 million that is potentially going to be assigned to the local enterprise partnership look rather small when Torbay Council on its own is planning a fund of around £50 million.

It is welcome that that money is being used and—without giving away some of the details that perhaps would not be appropriate to share publicly—it has been encouraging to speak with the Torbay Development Agency and the

council about the ways in which some of that public investment might be used to unlock schemes that we have been waiting some time for, not least in our town centres in both Torquay and Paignton.

Transport infrastructure makes a huge difference. We have had the welcome investment of the Kingskerswell bypass, which serves my constituency and goes through the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), after the small matter of a 61-year wait since it was first proposed. That delay also brings home why it is so important that we get on with some of these projects. We have issues such as Stonehenge that are almost as long-standing. The debates around Dawlish, which began in the 1930s and were delayed by world war two, are still going. Also, once decisions are made, we need to crack on and deliver what we can.

Also, it is important not only to look at the tracks but to have trains running over them. While we are debating rail resilience, at the same time I have CrossCountry Trains trying to axe most of their services to my constituency. We need the tracks and the services running over them.

I am conscious both of the time and that other colleagues wish to speak. I hope to see more investment in broadband speeds, but the key message that I would join others in giving is that we now have a united voice in the south-west, including, to be fair, the support of our sole Opposition representative, the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw). We do not have some of the petty rivalries that we saw in the past. That is why it is important for the Government to back the plans that are coming forth from the region, which will deliver not only for the south-west but for the country as a whole.

10.11 am

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter) on securing this timely debate. It is the latest in a series of debates on the south-west and it is fantastic to hear so many colleagues speaking with one voice about our area.

I welcome the south-west growth charter, which originated, as we have heard, at the south west growth summit at Exeter University. I was able to attend part of that summit and I congratulate Pennon, the CBI and the *Western Morning News* on putting it together. Too often, we have not spoken as one voice in the south-west; the time to do so is now.

It is no secret that the south-west has lost out in terms of infrastructure investment in comparison with other areas. I just say gently to the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), who talked about successive periods of under-funding, that he was a member of a Labour Government that did nothing for the south-west for 13 years. Nevertheless, it is true to say that during those years, and before, we have suffered from under-investment. One example is that during the past 20 years transport spending in the south-west has averaged £35 a head compared with a national average of £98 a head, which has left the region £2 billion behind other areas. That has been a wasted opportunity, considering the vast economic potential of the area.

To take my own constituency of East Devon as an example, just a week or so ago I was at Exeter science park to look at the new £97 million Met Office

supercomputer, which will make Exeter and the surrounding area a world-class place to do science. There is also the brand new and growing community of Cranbrook, just near Exeter airport, which offers another fantastic opportunity for local growth. As for Exeter airport itself, I very much hope that the Chancellor will say something about air passenger duty, which discriminates against Flybe, which operates out of the airport.

The south-west has huge connectivity, not least to Northern Ireland. When I was Minister of State for Northern Ireland, I used to fly regularly from Exeter to Belfast. I must say that the south-west welcomes tourists, of course, not least—I am pleased to say that I was in some way involved with this—the First Minister of Northern Ireland, who has holidayed in Cornwall in the past few years and who enjoyed herself there very much indeed.

I welcome Government plans to dual and upgrade the A30 and the A303. This is a much-needed and overdue upgrade that should have been carried out decades ago. I regret that there is still a question over some of the funding for this project; that question needs to be urgently resolved. Personally, I am disappointed that full dualling of this stretch of the road has been ruled out. I believe that a half-baked compromise will give the impression, once again, that the south-west is forgotten when it comes to infrastructure investment.

I give wholehearted support to the work of the Peninsula Rail Task Force. We have heard about the timely announcement today; it is also an appropriate announcement, in a sense, given the problems we are experiencing today as a result of all trains from Exeter to Taunton being either delayed or cancelled. That underscores, yet again, the need for greater resilience, faster journey times, more capacity and connectivity. These are absolutely the right priorities.

I also agree with the right hon. Member for Exeter that too often over the years when we have heard about investment in the “south-west”, people are talking about Bristol. However, some of us in the Chamber mean Exeter, Plymouth, Penzance and so forth, and we would like to see some of the money that is going to the north of England to unlock the northern powerhouse and to provide HS2 being used instead for small projects in our area. For instance, I support Devon County Council’s bid to the new stations fund for a new station at Marsh Barton, in the right hon. Gentleman’s constituency, which will make it much easier for constituents in East Devon and so forth to travel into and around Exeter and the surrounding area.

On broadband, we have had some leaked announcements, or some possible announcements, coming out of the autumn statement that we will have more money for connectivity and broadband. Again, we cannot argue for that too much in the south-west; it is absolutely a priority. Curiously, it is the more urban parts of East Devon, such as the Exeter suburb of Newcourt, that often have the worst internet speeds in the area, so improving connectivity and broadband is absolutely key.

As for the growth deal funding, considering the historic underfunding and the future potential of the south-west, it is disappointing—to say the least—that the provisional growth deal award is set to be so low. The Heart of the South West local enterprise partnership put together a £109 million growth deal that contained 26 projects,

[*Sir Hugo Swire*]

including investment in superfast broadband. The provisional allocation of £15 million to £20 million is nowhere near sufficient and the Government need to go away and look at this issue.

As the right hon. Member for Exeter reminded me, it was the south-west Members of Parliament who delivered a victory for the Conservative party in 2015. So, we are owed for the victory that led to the formation of a Conservative Government. We had a manifesto for the south-west and at the next election in 2020 we should feel proud to be held to account for the commitments that each and every one of us stood on. At the moment, we have made a start, but we are by no means there. Nevertheless, this debate today represents a good move in the right direction.

10.16 am

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter) on securing this very important debate. He made a clear statement and the phrase that sprang out for me was that we do not come here today with a “begging bowl”. Indeed we do not, but, as other Members have said, it would be remiss of us if we did not point out that for many years, and under Governments of all colours, the south-west has not received its fair share of investment. We need to put that right.

The reason is that, as this charter for growth shows very clearly indeed, the south-west is a vibrant and dynamic place to do business. The south-west has a very bright economic future and that was very much the feeling at the south west growth summit on 21 October in Exeter. That is also very much the feeling in my part of the south-west—North Devon.

This issue is all about setting out how the Government can work with the region to increase investment, productivity and economic opportunities. I must stress that it is about working together; this is a partnership. In the south-west, including in North Devon, there are brilliant and resourceful businesses, public authorities and third sector organisations bursting with ideas, which make the south-west a magnet for investment. However, to release all of that potential and to make things happen, we need investment in our infrastructure, as colleagues have said only too clearly.

For me, the key is one word and that is “connectivity”. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon and other colleagues have mentioned the roads that need to be vastly improved: the A303; the A30; and the A358. Also, I am sure that my hon. Friend also meant to mention the A361, which is the North Devon link road and the vital link between the M5 and North Devon. The former Prime Minister, David Cameron, once accused me of “banging on” about that road, which was a charge I was absolutely proud to plead guilty to. We must have investment in the North Devon link road.

Another issue is the resilience of our rail network. All the various newspapers have been mentioned—I am sure that the story is also in the *North Devon Journal* this morning—and they have pointed out that the rail links to the south-west are pretty much cut off this morning. That is something up with which we must not put.

On broadband, we hear that there is talk of investment in “hyper-speed” broadband. I have to say that in some parts of North Devon we have “no-speed” broadband at the moment. So let us at least get the car on the road before we push down the accelerator pedal.

Industrial strategy is also important. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made some very welcome remarks about industrial strategy yesterday and I hope we will hear some more about it in the autumn statement tomorrow.

It is reckoned by those who put together the south-west growth strategy that properly investing in our region’s connectivity could give gross valued-added economic benefits of £41.6 billion and create 22,000 jobs, and there could be extra economic benefits in things such as tourism and financial services of another £21 billion on top of that. It should not be a matter of whether we like the growth idea but of when we make the necessary moves to ensure that the south-west can grow in the way the document foresees. Yes, we want our fair share of Government investment, and the charter for growth shows that we are more than ready, willing and able to use that investment potentially to create a regional economy like no other. We are like a coiled spring, ready to unleash all that economic energy. I say, “Give us that chance. Northern powerhouse, you ain’t seen nothing yet”.

10.20 am

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Today we ask the Government for support. We ask for support for the south-west charter for growth. We speak with one voice—businesses, politicians, the community. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) said, we have huge, untapped potential. The figures need to be written in stone. The potential is there, yet we are the second-lowest funded region in the country. We could do so much better.

One of the challenges is that our economy is not well understood. People look at the south-west and think of us as a sleepy farming community or sleepy fishing community. That is completely wrong. Farming and fishing are very important. We feed the country; we have £2.7 billion turnover from our farming. As for tourism, we are the second most visited area after London, with 19% of those who come to this country coming to the south-west. So we have own powerhouse, thank you very much, but our potential must not be forgotten. Our marine sector represents a fifth of the UK’s marine sector. That is not small beer. We are a nuclear industry leader and we have the UK’s first nuclear industrial cluster. We have the brains. We have the power, and we want to be able to unleash it. In aerospace and advanced engineering we have 14 of the 15 top companies, plus 900 smaller supply chain companies. Some of the larger ones—for example, Centrax Industries and Centek Group—and some smaller ones, including Teignbridge Propellers, are in my constituency.

We are the south-west engine. We want a partnership with Government to build an industrial strategy to deliver productivity, not just for the south-west but for UK plc. We will collaborate. We will invest together. This is not just putting out a begging bowl to the Government. We will invest, train and retain. There is an increasing number of young people in our community

and many young people come through our first-class education system and universities, so it simply is not true that the south-west is full of those who have retired. But we need the Government's commitment to the south-west. We need, as my colleagues have argued, money going into road and rail. We need support for the Peninsula Rail Task Force report that will be released later today, and we must not forget the airports and the ports. They are very important.

The digital connectivity issue can never be underestimated, and although I am sure I could spend the rest of my four minutes talking about it, the points have already been clearly made. Without mobile, without broadband, we simply cannot unleash the potential. The point about energy connectivity is right. We lead in renewables but we do not have a joined-up system, and that is preventing inward investment.

The south-west engine has the third-highest number of businesses in the UK behind London and the south-east, so we should not be underestimated. We have the most untapped potential but for that investment from the Government, and we, as local businesses, are prepared to play our part. We have huge investment potential. I echo my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon: dream on northern powerhouse, the engine is here in the south-west.

10.24 am

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I feel like I ought to go like a train, Sir Roger, in the time limit, but not like the trains that were running out of the south-west yesterday, which were not going at all. I sometimes feel like I am the Boadicea of the north of the south-west region, and that my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter), who so gallantly brought this debate to the House, is like the Alan Sugar of the south of the region, but in between, we have a myriad of talent. We are a talented force and we are joining forces and working together for our region.

We should not be underestimated. As my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir Hugo Swire) said, the south-west Conservative MPs won the election—to get political about it. There are 51 of us and we should not be underestimated. We came into this House on a manifesto promise to increase productivity in the south-west, and we are determined to do that but we cannot do it without the right framework behind us. We already have so much going in the south-west; we are achieving a lot. We have a lot of top-quality businesses and companies, but we could do more with the right framework, so I urge the Minister to listen and not to take us for granted.

One must always have a plan and a strategy, and we do. We have the south-west growth charter, and we also have our local enterprise partnerships working. We have a really solid framework from which to work. We are not working individually—although we all have our individual bids—but as a team, particularly on infrastructure and our particular asks.

In the time I have I will focus on just a couple of areas: skills and infrastructure. As I said, we already have some top-quality companies in my constituency. I must mention the Claims Consortium Group, with its Investors in People gold standard, the Ministry of Cake, Peter Brett Associates, Albert Goodman, Francis Clark,

and Viridor, which is under the Pennon banner. There are so many of them, all doing great work, but they could all do more. So often, we find it difficult to attract the right talent and keep it in our region, and that is something we need to concentrate on. I applaud the Government's apprenticeship scheme—I think it will work well—but we need to work more. I have the first nuclear apprenticeship degree in my constituency, being run through Bridgwater and Taunton College, and, as has been said, we need to build on the nuclear strength we have in the south-west.

We need to build on health, aerospace, textiles and marine—the things we are really good at and strong in already—but it is important that we work with the region as part of the Government's industrial strategy. We must ensure that we do not miss out on any designations that are being handed out under the strategy outlined in the Green Paper. We need to be part of the bidding process but we need to win, and we must not be hampered if we do not happen to have signed a devolution deal yet. We are already doing good work and we must not be hampered, or even penalised.

I will just mention AgustaWestland, as many people who live in my constituency work there. I had a very good meeting with the company. It employs 17,500 people across the south-west. It particularly urges innovation and investment in science and technology, with which I think we would all agree.

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Rebecca Pow: I will give way to my hon. Friend, because the company is in his constituency.

Marcus Fysh: Yes, that is a wonderful industry and we need to focus on it and raise its skill levels. Investing in infrastructure is absolutely fundamental to what we are trying to achieve in the area.

Rebecca Pow: My hon. Friend is right. The company stressed to me that it is not just about wanting engineers to build helicopters but about attracting young people into the area to be those engineers. The industry is inspirational and is going somewhere. We need the seed-corn money from business, and grants for medium and small companies so that they can start to do research in that field. We can do that in the south-west; we can build on it and we can all take advantage of it.

I just want to throw in that we need a university. We are warm-hearted in Somerset, but we are a cold spot where academia is concerned. I would like to speak to the Minister about how we ease the numbers game so that we can apply to be a university.

I will sum up on the infrastructure note. We all agree that we have lots of ideas but the Minister needs to bring it on. We want to see the spades in the ground. I want to see the A358 come to fruition before the next election. We have to have junction 25 upgraded, we have to have the A303, and we have to have the road to Barnstaple done. They all work together. I ask the Minister to put some money back into growth deal 3. It was almost in the bag, but the bag seems to have been opened and the money has been let out. Please can we have that, devolution or no devolution?

[Rebecca Pow]

We can do it in the south-west. Give us the tools and we will deliver, but do not destroy our beautiful environments at the same time. We are a spectacularly stunning region. We can make the economy work but we can also make it work in a glorious environment.

10.30 am

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter) on securing this debate. Owing to lack of time, I will not be able to reflect on all hon. Members' contributions, which were extremely powerful in sending a message—I am sure the Minister received it—about the importance of the south-west and industry in the south-west. I want to reassure the hon. Gentleman that I do not see the south-west as a sleepy area. I am an MP for the north-east, which some may think is as far away from the south-west as one can get geographically, but in the north-east we are very fond of and admire the south-west. We share a history of mining and agriculture, as well as railways and great engineers, as other Members have mentioned.

The south-west has huge success stories, from the scientists of the Eden project to the engineers of the SC Group and AgustaWestland and the wine producers of the Campbell Valley. We would see such projects thrive if the Government sought fully to unleash the capabilities of all the regions of our United Kingdom. The charter for growth is a key step in achieving that. It is an opportunity for the Government to deliver on their promises, as has been pointed out by hon. Members, particularly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw).

We could say that, before the election, the Conservative party issued letters of promise for investment in the south-west to be redeemed after the election, but they have yet to be redeemed, as is clear from the contributions so far. I look forward to the Minister setting out how he will make right on the promises so freely given before the election.

Mr Bradshaw: One of the welcome differences with the current Prime Minister was an apparent willingness to invest more in infrastructure based on borrowing, which had been a long-time Labour policy. Does my hon. Friend agree that tomorrow will be a test of whether she was serious about that?

Chi Onwurah: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. It is absolutely clear that the economic failure of the previous Government to recognise the importance of counter-cyclical state investment has been rejected—in words at least—by the current Government. We will see tomorrow whether that rejection is made solid.

The previous Government's abolition of the regional development agencies, which supported growth outside London, exacerbated the problem. Growth in the regions of the UK, particularly the south-west, faced economic hardship from austerity, particularly in the way in which it drained demand and reduced income for those in the public and private sectors. The Government have an opportunity to address those failings. I understand the

sense of disappointment expressed by many MPs about the current indications that the local LEP will be materially disadvantaged in terms of regional funding because it does not have an elected mayor model. Now is the time for the Government to show they recognise that regions can achieve greatly without necessarily having a big man, a mayor, to meet the Government's requirements.

The need for the charter is urgent. The south-west received €1.5 billion from the European structural funds throughout the 2014 to 2020 funding cycle and that stimulates development in the region. In fact, the south-west received the second highest amount of money from the European Union, second only to nearby Wales. Business in the area must be concerned about the Government's toxic combination of indecision, doubt and confusion about Brexit. A commitment to a growth charter would be the first step in providing some answers for companies in the south-west.

Investment in physical infrastructure is one of the very important points in the charter. I must say I admire and respect the south-western Members of Parliament for making it to Parliament today, given the extraordinary lengths that some had to go to to make the journey from the south-west. For proper investment, we need long-term patient funding rather than the current short-term free market approach. For example, as has been mentioned, the A303, A30 and A358 corridor between Taunton, Honiton and Amesbury is key to reducing journey times to markets, promoting the inward investment that will help make the south-west's economy more self-sustaining, as well as strengthening the already vibrant tourism in the area.

As hon. Members have said, rail links are equally important. The 20-year plan will bring jobs and growth to the region, as well as faster connections to the London airports. Businesses in the south-west should have better access to Bristol, London and the midlands, as well as to Heathrow and Gatwick. Rail links are key not just to link the south-west to other English economic hubs, but to support British industry and manufacturing. This investment should be brought forward and considered a priority. How will the Minister ensure that the Infrastructure Commission is independent and fully funded to make the much needed investment in our regional infrastructure?

However, physical infrastructure is not the whole story. As Member after Member has pointed out, in the face of the fourth industrial revolution, digital connectivity is just as important, so the plan for an ultra-fast south-west is welcome. The Labour Government left office with fully costed plans for universal broadband by 2012. As has been said today, we still have many businesses and individuals who cannot even get access to broadband speeds of 2 megabits, never mind the ultra-high speed mentioned in the announcements made today; and the universal service obligation is still four years away.

The European Union investment that was so welcome in Cornwall will not be available post-Brexit, and yet Ofcom researchers showed that in rural areas 48% of premises are unable to receive speeds above 10 megabits. I look forward to the Minister saying specifically how his Government will invest in rural broadband.

James Heapey: The shadow Minister is obviously aware of the speech delivered by the then Prime Minister and Chancellor in January last year setting out the

long-term economic plan for our region. Her speech today has reflected that Conservative vision for our region. Should we assume she supports it?

Chi Onwurah: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I support regional economies that are strong and sustainable, where investment is in people, skills and infrastructure. I support economies that deliver high-quality jobs that enable his constituents to make plans for their own futures, rather than being at the whim of short-term, zero-hour, low-skill, low-value jobs. That is the vision for the future economy of the south-west, and indeed for the country, that I wholeheartedly support.

I look forward to the Minister setting out exactly what his industrial strategy is. The Prime Minister has created a Department with industrial strategy in its title—I have yet to hear what the strategy is. The Prime Minister's speech yesterday did not set out how the Government will, for example crowd in investment from the private sector in innovation, new opportunities and skills. As a Member of Parliament for the north-east, I too regret the skills brain drain from our regions to the capital because of its stronger economy.

I particularly look forward to the Minister setting out how the Government's industrial strategy is not simply an ever-growing reduction in corporation tax but one that takes our whole country with it to invest in increased industry, shifting the centre of gravity away from London to support our great regions, such as the south-west. The south-west growth charter is to be welcomed. I look forward to the Minister demonstrating that he will support its implementation.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the Minister, due to the incredible self-discipline exercised by colleagues, we have a reasonable amount of time. I congratulate you all on achieving that. We have called 13 Members in one form or another in addition to the Front-Bench spokespeople. I regard that as exceptional. Without wishing to incite insurrection, that does mean that the Minister will therefore probably be able to take interventions and still allow time for Mr Streeter to respond at the end of the debate.

10.41 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman): Thank you, Sir Roger, for that incendiary opening remark. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship and it is an absolute delight to take part in such a generally wise, good-natured, warm and constructive debate. It is a particular delight for me to look round Westminster Hall and see the serried ranks of Conservative MPs from the south-west, and even the conservative Member from the Opposition, the excellent right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), who in so many ways shares so many of our inclinations.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter) for calling this debate on a very important area and set of issues. We have already heard reference to Boadicea and Sir Alan Sugar from my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), but I like to think of my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon as a kind of Abraham—a patriarch

of the south-west, bringing his wisdom to bear and providing moral and spiritual, as well as parliamentary, leadership.

We have heard some excellent contributions. Not everyone is still in their place for reasons we perfectly understand. I have heard strong support for the area, the skills and the genius of the south-west; concern about infrastructure and connectivity; recognition of the Government's achievements to date; and a desire for Government to step forward and do more. I will not run through all of the excellent contributions we have heard, Sir Roger. It is testimony to your brilliant chairmanship that the imposition of a self-denying ordinance, an interesting contradiction in terms, has had the excellent effect of enlisting so many outstanding and brief contributions.

Let me just point to one or two wider considerations in response to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) and pick out some aspects of the industrial strategy, before turning to where we are with the south-west. It is fair to say that there is not a Member of this House who does not believe in the importance of economic growth. If there are any, let us invite them to consider the alternative, which is not only painful but regressive. Economic growth is a very important part of our lives and is likely to always remain so. It is also important to attend to the kind of growth that that implies, which is not always the same. We have seen boom and bust over the last few years nationally and that is not attractive. What we are looking for, and what I know colleagues across the south-west are looking for, is a sustainable basis for long-term economic development—and rightly so. That must be development that enhances the genius of the people involved to create higher productivity and greater real wealth.

If we look at the industrial strategy, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central suggested that somehow it is some great failure. The Government have talked about industrial strategy almost continuously since they were appointed and are undertaking a very careful, considered process of framing a consultation document to be launched in the next few weeks, which will invite every section of our society, not just businesses and corporations, to contribute and reflect on what could be the source of that long-term economic growth.

Rebecca Pow: On my point about AgustaWestland and other businesses, will the Minister ensure that we are investing enough money in business-oriented innovation and science, so that we can build a solid future, not a one-off industrial strategy, for our young people in particular?

Jesse Norman: It would, I think, be injudicious of me to anticipate announcements to be made over the next few days and, in some cases, already trailed. There has certainly been widespread speculation in the press about great support for research and innovation, including the development and technology side of the equation. We have already seen that. The structure of the Government being focused on trying to concert better relationships between sources of research, be they industrial or commercial, and the development and commercialisation of those technologies, makes that very clear. We will see a lot more of that over the next few weeks.

Mr Bradshaw: The Minister talks about the Government bringing forward a consultation document. We do not need a consultation document. That is what Governments say when they are going to do absolutely nothing and kick something into the long grass. Clear and specific promises were made by the Conservative party in the run-up to the last general election, with money behind them, which all the Conservative MPs speaking in the debate today have referenced. When will those promises be delivered? Where is the plan to deliver them?

Jesse Norman: I detect a slight faux indignation on the other side, and I am sorry about that. The industrial strategy of this country is a serious, long-term matter. It needs to be agreed in a bipartisan spirit. It needs to include the whole country, including the devolved Administrations and nations. It is not something to be decided and cut off. That, if I may say, is an expression of Blairite, Napoleonic Government. We are looking for a consensus and a stable basis for future development, which can be shared by all and can survive a change of Government—it is essentially long term in character.

An industrial strategy has been attempted at various points in our past in this country, not always with great success. In the 1940s and 1950s, we had models of industrialisation based on the armed forces and people in Whitehall yanking levers that steered the ship of state. We had the corporatism of the 1970s. I suspect that we are looking to something somewhat different. If hon. Members doubt the necessity, let me remind them of two things. First, those who say they do not have an industrial strategy almost invariably have one without knowing it. Secondly, no company or charitable organisation would dream of attempting to take money from investors or donors and use it over a period of time without having a strategy for how to do so. Nor should the Government.

Neil Parish: I am encouraged by that, but is part of the strategy broadband? When we talk about superfast and extra-superfast, can we make sure that the rural areas of this country are connected with some form of broadband?

Jesse Norman: As my hon. Friend understands, I am not the Minister for Culture, Media and Sport. He also knows that when I was Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, I took an active interest in that issue, and we commissioned a very reputable report from a group of academics and industry experts, which found, among other things, that BT Openreach was under-investing in its network by hundreds of millions of pounds a year. It was accretive to investors and was not down to its cost of capital. I do not want to speculate on the reasons for that, but its effect has been massively to penalise people—particularly those in rural areas. I am sure my hon. Friend supports today's announcement of a new fund to support other players in fibre through balance sheet-matched funding, which will enable fibre roll-out, particularly in rural and suburban areas, to proceed much faster than hitherto. That is a very welcome development.

James Heapey: The Minister is being very generous in giving way, and I am grateful. The long-term economic plan, to which I referred during the shadow Minister's speech, was delivered 18 months or so ago. In its analysis

of the region's infrastructure and our sectoral opportunities, it is not a thousand miles away from an industrial strategy. Will the Minister commit to making that long-term economic plan, which was delivered by the previous Prime Minister and Chancellor, the foundation for his industrial strategy for our region? Our region widely welcomed it at the ballot box.

Jesse Norman: The idea is not to slow the process of investment—as has been recognised today, there has been considerable investment across the south-west, in the form of city deals, enterprise zones, expansions and local growth funding—but to incorporate it within a more nuanced national consensus about what the future will look like, out of which we should get a shared view of how the south-west and other parts of the economy can grow.

I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the Prime Minister's early words: she pointed out that there are no privileged areas of the country. Some might have had deals in the past, on the basis of areas coming together, but that model can be embraced by everyone. One of the interesting things about this debate is that the unity of Members of Parliament is so evident, but it is not absolutely evident that that unity is shared all the way down the tree of local government. It might be worth reflecting on whether that might have an impact on the region's long-term development.

Sir Hugo Swire: My hon. Friend the Minister is doing a magnificent job at a time when it is impossible to get from Exeter, the capital city of Devon, to London because we have no trains. Can he communicate our frustration to the Government? If that were the case on the lines from Leeds to London, from Bradford to London, or from Manchester to London, there would be merry hell. We will not continue to put up with this sort of neglect for much longer.

Jesse Norman: I welcome my right hon. Friend's point. I need not say it myself, because he did so much more eloquently than I could. I recognise the issue that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) referred to, which was mentioned in the Peninsula Rail Task Force report, and on which campaign work has been done. I congratulate them on that.

I am conscious of the passage of time, notwithstanding your incendiary words, Sir Roger, so let me proceed. The key themes of the industrial strategy will be those that have been flagged up in this debate. There will be an emphasis on sectors, the commercialisation of research and development, and innovation, and there will be a particular focus on infrastructure, skills and abilities, and the embedded institutions in particular regions. Those issues have been brought out very well today.

As the hon. Member for South West Devon said, this is a relatively tightly defined debate in terms of place, but an industrial strategy has to reflect the fact that places are very different from one another. Defining what the south-west is and where it ends can be a challenge for the Government, even if it is not a challenge for those who live there. It is an extraordinarily diverse, beautiful region, which has extraordinary assets to be cherished and developed. It is home to world-class universities, very skilled people and hundreds of thousands of growing businesses, many of which are in advanced,

high-tech areas. The development at Hinkley Point C, which has already been mentioned, will give the region a major boost. The counterpart to that is the need to invest in smaller pieces of infrastructure.

An awful lot of people's happiness, certainly in rural areas—I speak as a Member of Parliament for Herefordshire, which can only gaze at the quality of the south-west's infrastructure and its access to higher education—depends on small-scale road and rail infrastructure, as well as large-scale connectivity. I certainly hope, as I know colleagues do, that that aspect of infrastructure development will be reflected in the plans to come.

Chi Onwurah: Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: I am afraid I am running out of time, owing to your excellent work, Sir Roger.

Chi Onwurah: He has not said anything; it was a totally content-free speech.

Jesse Norman: I am happy to take an intervention with your approval, Sir Roger.

Chi Onwurah: Before the Minister finishes, he said that the industrial strategy will take some time and that it will take allowance of skills and sectors. Will he give a concrete indication of how long the consultation will last and when the industrial strategy will be published? During that time, will he give a running commentary on what is in the industrial strategy so business can make appropriate plans?

Jesse Norman: It is difficult if remarks one has already made have not been heard. I have already said that the industrial strategy will be launched in the form of a consultation paper in the next few weeks. It is not a thing in and of itself. The Government anticipate that there will then be contributions and a further refinement. At some point, it will be published, and it will then be a reference document from which regions and businesses can take comfort and refer to when making their own plans.

That is the structure of the industrial strategy. It is fair to say, in that context, that the south-west has made its voice heard in a way that few other regions have succeeded in doing. It has done wonderfully well in flagging up the advantages of that part of the world. It is a pleasure for me to work with the two LEPs that have

been mentioned. I salute the work of the south west growth summit and the charter. We can only hope that that work will continue to be transferred into local energy and further Government investment.

10.57 am

Mr Streeter: The Minister, who knows I am a huge admirer of his, referred to the serried ranks of Conservative Members of Parliament from the south-west, and indeed he is right. The right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) is also right that commitments were given in the run-up to the previous election, particularly about infrastructure. If the Minister thinks that if we fail to deliver on those commitments there will still be serried ranks of Conservative MPs from the south-west after 2020, I am afraid he is sadly mistaken. In 2020, we will be judged on the infrastructure and connectivity we deliver for our region. We have heard some very warm and supportive words from the Government, and it is great that we will have an industrial strategy, but we want action. There is a time for making promises and commitments, and there is a time for delivery. The time for delivery is now.

This positive charter was put together by the business leadership in our region. It is very positive about what they will do in our region, but it asks the Government to make specific commitments about delivery over the next five years. It talks about digital, energy and transport connectivity. My wife, who is coming up to London today, looked at the Great Western Railway website and said, "I cannot catch a train from Plymouth to London." Colleagues were stranded yesterday afternoon and evening when trying to get from their constituencies to vote in an important debate in the House of Commons. People cannot get from Plymouth to London today by rail. It is not good enough. The time for promises is over. The time for delivery is now.

We want a new partnership between the private sector and the Government for the south-west. It is not rocket science. We know how to do infrastructure and connectivity. We want the Government to give us the resources and the commitment. We have the passion; give us the commitment.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the South West Charter for Growth.

Accident and Emergency Services: Merseyside and Cheshire

11 am

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered accident and emergency services in Merseyside and Cheshire.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and a pleasure to see the Minister in his place. We spent many a happy hour on the Public Accounts Committee in years gone by, and I have great respect for him. I am sure he will give due consideration to what I say.

The debate title is a slight misnomer, however, because it was intended to entice other colleagues from the Cheshire and Merseyside region. Sadly, they have not taken the bait, perhaps because of the limited time available, so I will talk largely and almost exclusively about my own patch.

Southport is a large seaside town on the Lancashire coast, with one of the most elderly populations in the UK. I have to point that out, because for some reason I am often confused with the Member for Stockport and I am referred to as such. Southport, however, is nothing like Stockport. Southport is a seaside town and has one district general hospital on a split site with Ormskirk. The accident and emergency provision, though, is split by age between the two sites, which is a bone of contention in Southport.

For the purpose of the sustainability and transformation review, Southport was grouped with other hospitals ringing Liverpool, including those in Aintree, St Helens, Whiston and Warrington. Southport has recently had a poor Care Quality Commission report on its A&E department and an equally poor review of its surgery. It has responded positively with further investment of £600,000 into the A&E department, so that now, according to the stats—I checked this with the chief executive only this week—it has one of the best-performing A&E departments in the north-west.

That might have been the end of the story, because the CQC report dates from some time back and because of the improvements, but for suppressed drafts of the Cheshire and Lancashire sustainability and transformation review that have been leaked. The leak showed a number of things, including a possible downgrading of Southport A&E and of other A&E departments in the area—the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) is now in the Chamber, and his is one of the areas affected, as we have discussed—as part of a cost-saving exercise.

That is not the first time that the suggestion has been made apropos of Southport, but the Minister knows from his own experience in Ludlow how politically explosive such suggestions can be and have been. He will also appreciate that those suggestions are sometimes entirely simplistic and often linked to another further bright suggestion that people come up with, which is to close down wards. The consultants charged with balancing the books, and often deferred to by the national health service, might come up with the brilliant suggestion that the best thing to be done with a loss-making hospital is to get it to do less—to stop admitting people to A&E, and finding space for them in wards, and therefore to close down A&E and shut down a few wards.

The Cheshire and Merseyside sustainability and transformation plan proposals were renegeged on somewhat in the final draft, so they fell short of actually advocating downgrades. However, that is not to say that that is not in mind as an ultimate objective.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Like him, I am concerned about the proposals set out in the STP and, with regards to east Cheshire, the document actually sets out that options being considered include downgrading from an A&E to an urgent care centre in Macclesfield. There needs to be greater transparency about the options and a frank conversation with people. There is already a Macclesfield petition signed by 8,000 people opposing any downgrading of A&E services in our area.

John Pugh: There is also a petition in Southport, and I am sure there will be petitions wherever in the country this sort of thing happens. As the hon. Gentleman suggests, the ownership of the sustainability and transformation reviews is wholly unclear. No one quite knows who writes the plans, or how they are agreed, and few democratically elected bodies or people, or patients, have any kind of input. In fact, the Liverpool local authorities wrote in some indignation to the authors of the report to ask, “How can we be involved? It alleges in your report that we are involved, but we do not appear to be.” Furthermore, no one quite knows why the hospitals have been grouped as they are.

Southport hospital is in a particularly unfortunate position, because it has changed its chair recently and suspended its chief executive over a period of a year, so it is unclear to me how Southport and Ormskirk’s views could have been represented in any review. Roadshows were organised by the clinical commissioning groups to talk about the financial plight of the local NHS and things that need to be done, and I have attended some of them, but they spend all their time talking about things such as savings on prescriptions and none on the big league stuff that is agreed and discussed in NHS boardrooms. There is absolutely no transparency, and I am sure hon. Members share in my cynicism. We await the real cost-saving proposals—or, in some cases, the empire-building proposals that are often disguised by blather about clinical efficiency and safety, which come almost after the event.

I speak with some cynicism, because I am a veteran of such carryings-on. I regret all the back-stage manoeuvres and, in particular, that no one has been around to champion my local hospital in the review. There is a good case for keeping our A&E—elderly people throughout the country are the major clients of A&E, for obvious reasons.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The debate is clearly about Merseyside, but the issues for accident and emergency are the same everywhere in the United Kingdom, including in Northern Ireland. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern about A&E being on the frontline of the NHS, so that is where the spend clearly needs to be? Does he also share my concern about Government policies to close some pharmacies, with their role, which will push many minor ailments to A&E, creating even more problems?

John Pugh: Precisely. I am going on to some brief analysis of the problems of A&E, but it is certainly the line in the sand that we must defend.

Elderly people are obviously the major clients for A&E, and Southport by any analysis has an enormous number—a very high percentage—of people who will require A&E. Moreover, as the ambulance service says, and as the hospital will confirm, when people arrive at A&E these days they are iller than ever before. The reason for that is that access to GPs and to social care is worsening—social care has suffered extensive cuts, and has done so in my area, and is struggling.

To make matters worse, one reason for A&E throughput being a little slow is that, more than ever, people going to A&E are not being turned around and sent home, but need to be admitted, so beds are needed for them, although previous reports recommended ward closures in Southport hospital. Furthermore, discharging people from existing wards is a slower process, because social services are, frankly, struggling. The system is getting logjammed, with ambulances at one end and people not being discharged at the other.

To add to the problem is a matter that the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper) will wish to bring up: the CCGs have taken the community care contract off Southport hospital, where I thought it was well placed, and given it to two organisations new to the field. How that is supposed to help integration, I do not know.

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): There is a serious problem in West Lancashire and the Southport conurbation. The local population has been excluded from all these decision-making processes. There is a serious need for the NHS bosses to explain what they mean by “downgrading”, as their perception of A&E can vary quite significantly from my community’s understanding. Simply sharing information without any explanation leads to anxiety and serious distress about the future of health services. I come back to the point that the hon. Gentleman has just been making: in the face of the fact that it will destabilise the hospital, the CCG—that is the local GPs—has just awarded the contract for urgent and community services to Virgin Care, which has no real track record. We do not have a real assessment of what is going on, and my constituents are being put at risk.

John Pugh: I thank the hon. Lady for that clarification and amplification. There really is a problem with integration, and I do not know how that will be better solved by bringing more organisations—particularly untried organisations—into the fray.

We are all exasperated by watching people make a hash of things and create rather than solve problems. CCGs are neither accountable nor always reasonable, and frankly sometimes have their own agendas. They are often tough on hospitals but less so on GPs. They are of course GP-led organisations, which is a weakness in how they are structured. I have a letter from the biggest surgery in my patch complaining about abuse received by receptionists. Hon. Members will be able to guess what that abuse is about. It is not excusable, but the rationale for that abuse is that people are having real difficulty making appointments in a timely and effective way, and as a result they are going to A&E, sometimes in desperation. Surveys that I have done over time have

shown GP access to be as much of an issue in my constituency as A&E waiting times. As the hon. Lady just said, NHS bosses collectively are either deliberately or accidentally causing the destabilisation and unbalancing of provision in the area, and no one can stop them.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for being so generous. Does he share my concern that the STP for Cheshire and Merseyside talks of

“leaving the work at STP to focus on creating a framework to support development of”

accountable care organisations? ACOs are generally associated with insurance-based systems such as those that exist in the US. Does he share my concern that that fragmentation is to do with breaking up the national health service?

John Pugh: I am not sure whether that is the deliberate intent, but that is certainly a possible result.

Rosie Cooper: CCGs are nominally accountable to the Secretary of State or NHS England. Will the Minister address who actually guarantees that CCGs will provide really good service? The incompetent CCG in Liverpool that presided over the unholy mess at Liverpool Community Health NHS Trust has been allowed to preside over future services and new contracts in Liverpool. It is the same incompetent organisation. How is that okay?

John Pugh: The hon. Lady reinforces the point that I was going to make next. No one in the NHS locally is in a position to bang heads together and say, “Hang on, what do the public actually want or expect here?” The CCGs speak to NHS England and the Secretary of State. They are the decision makers. It seems to me that one of the coalition Government’s biggest mistakes was abolishing the regional strategic arms of the NHS—the bodies accountable for integrating and making things work together and making services across an area work effectively. Instead, we have groups of special interests—the big providers on one side and wholly unaccountable CCGs on the other—and, frankly, a recipe for chaos.

Margaret Greenwood: On accountability, does the hon. Gentleman share my concern—I would welcome a response from the Minister on this point—that the Health and Social Care Act 2012 took away the Secretary of State’s duty to provide and secure a national health service in England? That is one of that Act’s key flaws.

John Pugh: There was actually an attempt to make clear in that legislation where responsibility lay. I am very familiar with that debate and do not want to re-engage with it at the moment.

There is an absence of a genuine force for integration at a local level. We all know that there are institutions in any local environment that will be shored up at all costs, regardless of the clinical benefits to the population. Like the banks, a big private finance initiative such as the Royal Liverpool hospital will never be allowed to fail, because when PFIs fail, they revert to the Government’s books. Such services therefore tend to attract neighbouring services, whether or not it is a good idea for those neighbouring services to be attracted and regardless of the practicalities or the patients.

[John Pugh]

To come to some sort of conclusion, without a 24/7 A&E in Southport and all that follows from that—a great deal follows from that in terms of what other services may then go—people will suffer longer and more anxious journeys. I shudder to think what would happen if there were an incident at a big event in Southport, such as the flower show, the air show or the musical fireworks, and we did not have a 24/7 A&E. For better or worse, Southport is on the periphery of Merseyside and the hospital is also used by large parts of Lancashire. Southport straddles the boundary between Sefton and West Lancashire. The local hospital trust has to interact with two CCGs that face different ways. As it stands, the hospital is massively convenient for patients but inconvenient for those who like symmetry in the NHS. Precisely because of that, we are in constant danger of being overlooked and not championed, which is why Sefton Council recently passed a motion drawing attention to its concerns, particularly about the A&E.

Hon. Members will have gathered that I do not have entire confidence in the transformation process. None of us will say that we are not aware of the need to work more smartly and in a more integrated fashion to make the health pound work a lot harder, but the record will show that this is not the first time that I and the hon. Member for West Lancashire have brought the affairs of this hospital and this health service patch to the House's attention. I fought off a previous attempt to get rid of our A&E when that was mooted by consultants on the usual ground that if the NHS ceases to do anything, it will cease to cost anything. The public have campaigned vigorously for an urgent care centre in Southport, and a succession of Ministers have been lobbied in this place about that plan, only for it to be scuppered by behind-the-scenes NHS politics. I have no reason to feel any confidence at all in this process—not when I see the hospital trust itself make a complete hash of whistleblowing charges against senior management and protract the process through its own simple incompetence.

Rosie Cooper *rose*—

John Pugh: The hon. Member for West Lancashire is positively bursting to get in.

Rosie Cooper: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that STPs are in danger of becoming a managerial exercise in contingency and risk planning, where the NHS speaks to itself? Several years ago, in the Health Committee, I put to Bruce Keogh the charge that where we were going, there would be 30-plus trauma centres in this country and every A&E would be downgraded. With STPs, the NHS is talking to itself, not the communities it serves, and it will come up with that very same plan. I can see that happening in front of me right now.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I have to make the point that these half-hour debates are specifically the property of the Member in charge. Mr Pugh is entitled to give way to whomever he chooses, but interventions should be interventions, not speeches, and every moment that is taken curtails the opportunity for the Minister to respond.

John Pugh: Thank you, Sir Roger. We are on the home straight now. The trust that we are talking about has been under the management of a series of interims over the past year. That has not helped its affairs. Why should the people of Southport suffer? We have been poorly served—not by the doctors, the nurses and the hard-working staff, but by the NHS high command. People are angry. If they are to be repaid for their anger by having further services taken off them, that anger will simply come the Government's way, to the Secretary of State who will make any final decisions.

I want to make a plea. Let us not have another NHS stitch-up on any patch, where MPs, councils, local people, patients and all the access issues provoked by these arrangements normally are ignored. Let us not have a *fait accompli* that suits special interests that is covered over at the last minute with a veneer of clinical justification. Let us have local decision making that is not a sham or a pretence, but is genuine local decision making. Lord Lansley had a frequent saying in many a debate on health—I am not a great fan of him, but the saying bears repetition—which was, “Nothing about me, without me.” We have had lots done to us with the health service on our patch, but it has always been without any genuine involvement of the population or their representatives. I make a plea to the Minister that he tries to correct that or to reassure me that this time it ain't gonna happen.

11.21 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne): It is a great pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) on securing the debate. He referenced the fact that we served together on the Public Accounts Committee many years ago in the early days of my parliamentary career, and I have therefore long understood his forensic approach to matters affecting his constituency. He has shown that again today with his characterisation of the health needs of Southport. It is good to see a number of neighbouring MPs joining this short debate. They share a common interest in guaranteeing high-quality health services for their local residents. We in the Department of Health obviously share that interest.

I have listened carefully to the concerns the hon. Gentleman has expressed about A&E services in particular in the local area. He and other Members have touched on wider health issues, and I will try to address some of those in the few moments I have today. I am particularly aware of the concerns he concluded with about the potential of the sustainability and transformation plan proposals for the area, which include urgent care among many other things. I will touch on that in my remarks.

We all recognise the increasing pressures in the NHS, particularly as we move into winter. I am sure all Members would acknowledge the hard work and dedication of those providing high-quality services across the NHS, including in Southport, which the hon. Gentleman referred to. The NHS cannot stand still, however, and services need to change to continue to meet patient need and patient expectation. Nationally, there were some 1.95 million attendances at A&E departments in September, compared with around 1.86 million in September 2015—an increase of 4.9% in only 12 months. Some 1.77 million patients were admitted, transferred or discharged within four

hours, compared with 1.73 million a year ago—an increase of 1.85%. I give the House those statistics to point out that the NHS is seeing and treating more people within its targets than ever before. In Merseyside and Cheshire, that means that more than 2,400 more patients were transferred, admitted or discharged within four hours of arrival this September as compared with last September.

Turning specifically to the Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust, there are clearly performance matters that need to be addressed. Although its A&E performance does not meet the national 95% target, at 91.5% it is above the national average of 90.6%. As the hon. Gentleman said, its current A&E performance is relatively better than that elsewhere. However, the CQC report that he touched on, which was published last week, rated the A&E department as “inadequate” for safety and “requires improvement” for all other fields apart from caring. Although that may be based on work done some months ago, I am sure he would agree that it is unacceptable. The trust needs to improve its performance for the people of Southport.

John Pugh: The Minister is making an important point. The argument about the CQC inspections is to some extent related to what the CQC inspects. If it is inspecting an A&E department—I hope I made this clear in my speech—the CQC often has to bear in mind the fact that it is not an isolated unit. A&E works in conjunction with adult social care, the ambulance service and so on. Getting snapshots of a poorly performing department without taking into account the background and the other arrangements in and around A&E can give a false picture of where the problem lies.

Mr Dunne: I am not going to get into a prolonged debate about the CQC report, but it rates the entire trust as “requires improvement”. We have confidence in the overall reporting, and looking at A&E in that context reflects an accurate impression of the current status of the trust. For example, three of the trust’s seven A&E consultant posts are filled by locums or agency staff. That mix of staffing is not sustainable for any A&E department. I am aware that the trust and its commissioners are looking to address that.

Several hon. Members referred in interventions on the hon. Member for Southport to the NHS sustainability and transformation plans. I emphasise to the House that STPs are collaborative plans designed to help local organisations deliver on the “Five Year Forward View”. They are formed by CCGs, providers and local authorities working together in an area to develop a plan. Some have also involved other stakeholders who will be affected by changes in their area and can contribute to improvements. The true test will be whether a revised healthcare system really improves matters for patients.

We are still at an early stage in the process. The local NHS describes the plan for Cheshire and Merseyside as a plan for a plan at this stage. I will not therefore pass

judgement today on the STP process or the content of the Cheshire and Merseyside STP. I am not in a position to do so. I do not know the local position as well as the local clinicians who have drawn up the plan; no one in Westminster or Whitehall does. Local clinicians must ensure that they involve the public and patients—and Members, as the hon. Gentleman called for in his closing remarks—and explain what they think is best for each local area. I reject the charge that the plan will not involve the local communities; it absolutely needs to involve local communities to be taken forward. It is a central tenet of the approval of the plans that there is public engagement.

Rosie Cooper *rose*—

Mr Dunne: I am afraid I have very little time, and the hon. Lady will have an opportunity to pick my brains directly on anything I do not address in my remarks, because we are meeting next week. I am happy to talk to her. We have had a dialogue over some of the health issues that are of most concern to her, and I thank her for her efforts in bringing those to my attention.

The STP process is not run by or for the Department of Health. It is run by the NHS for patients of the NHS. Design of health services, including front-line health services and A&E, is a matter for the local NHS. The reforms that my noble Friend Lord Lansley made when he was in post have put clinicians in charge of the care people receive and how it is delivered to serve their populations best. Local authorities are vital in helping set the direction of health and social care development locally. Guidance on STPs from NHS England has been clear about the importance of local authorities in partnership arrangements and of the NHS working with local authorities to deliver prevention and public health improvements. It is crucial that the NHS and local authorities work closely to ensure the key aims of the STP process can be delivered: better health, better patient care and improved NHS efficiency.

The STP for Cheshire and Merseyside was published a week ago, on 15 November. As I said, the NHS described it as a plan for a plan. In the area represented by the hon. Member for Southport, it builds on the “Shaping Sefton” local delivery system, which I understand had considerable public engagement. It is disappointing that the leaking of an early and incomplete draft of the STP led to speculation and some concern. I hope that the publication of the formal document will dispel some of those fears. I assure the hon. Gentleman that no changes to the services people currently receive will be made without local engagement. When and if final plans propose service change, formal consultation will follow in due course.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Self Care Week

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Self Care Week 2016.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I am delighted to have secured this debate, timed to take place just after Self Care Week. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on primary care and public health, I have taken an interest in self-care for some years. Self-care is essential for healthy living, and self-care certainly does not mean no care. Self-care is also essential for the future sustainability of the NHS.

There are two reasons why the Department of Health established Self Care Week in 2009, which is a national awareness week to support people to better look after their physical health and mental wellbeing. The Minister was not in office when the NHS was grappling with reforms and reorganisation in 2010, but at that time the Self Care Forum, a charity that aims to further the reach of self-care and embed it in everyday life, was asked to take over the organisation of Self Care Week. Since then, it has gone from strength to strength, with growing numbers of local and regional health organisations running events and activities across the country to support and educate people in their health.

The theme for the 2016 Self Care Week was improving people's health literacy. According to the Royal College of General Practitioners, 60% of working-age adults find health information too complex to understand. That worrying statistic shows that there is an urgent need to empower people in their health and improve health literacy across the population. When people play a more collaborative role in managing their health and care, they are less likely to use emergency hospital services and more likely to stick to their treatment plans and to take medicines correctly. Those who are more involved are less anxious, more satisfied, less likely to complain and tend to enjoy better outcomes and a better quality of life than those who are less involved. It is awful jargon, but it is true, that person-centred care is good for healthcare professionals, too. As patient engagement increases, staff performance and morale sees a corresponding increase.

Earlier this year, the all-party group on primary care and public health carried out an inquiry into the NHS's five-year forward view. We looked specifically at behaviour change information and signposting and concluded that poor health literacy was harming the nation's health and contributing to the pressures on the national health service. In other words, the NHS is failing to harness the potential of patients to improve and maintain their own health.

To address that, we recommended that comprehensive health education should be included in the national curriculum to improve the health literacy of children, who are future health service users. That health education should go beyond the usual sex, relationships and drug education programmes and include, for example, information on the national health service, its history and structure and the right way to access services.

It is important that the elderly do not think that self-care ends when they move into a care home. They must be able to maintain their independence and live life to the full. A main component of that is ensuring that they are able to buy personal goods. I was therefore disappointed when I was contacted by a constituent who was concerned about the treatment of his mother-in-law in relation to the personal expenses allowance that people in nursing homes get. That allowance has not been raised at all, which means that, due to inflation, people have less money to spend. In an email to me, he said:

“Recently, as you will be aware, her annual pension and pension credit increased by 2.9% in line with inflation. However, the PEA remained at £24.90 per week. So in effect her increase in Pension and Pension Credit from Central Government was passed straight through to the Local Government and she has received zero increase. No doubt her personal items such as underwear, clothes, shoes sweets etc. will increase in cost this year leaving her actually worse off for the increase.”

It seems I have dropped this on the Minister—that was not my intention, but it is an opportune time to bring the case to his attention—but will he explain now or later why the personal expenses allowance was not raised in line with inflation or even further?

Health education needs to continue throughout life, particularly at key stages such as when people start university, have their first child or retire. That would help people to understand which parts of the NHS they should use based on their health needs and whether they need to access health services or could self-treat safely at home.

It may be an opportune time to mention this. I am one of the three Rotherham MPs and we have a scheme called social prescribing, which is contracted and paid for by the Rotherham clinical commissioning group. I understand that the team from the Rotherham social prescribing service, who I spoke to at a community function last Friday night, have spent some time with the Secretary of State, who has seen exactly what they do. They are helping people with long-term health conditions to use a wide variety of services and take part in activities provided by voluntary organisations and community groups; 1,600 different community groups are playing a part.

People do not always need medicines. Medicines play a part in people's life where the health service does not engage, and we would not expect it to do so, but the scheme is about preventing people from going into the healthcare system. I know a lot is changing now in the plans being laid down at local level, which are advancing in Rotherham as well, but something like social prescribing is a good way of involving other people—not just the health service—in helping to ensure that people avoid, if at all possible, going into the health service.

Last week, the Proprietary Association of Great Britain—the trade association that represents the consumer health industry—published new research that found that 92% of people agree that it is important to take responsibility for their own health to ease the burden on the national health service. Despite that, 46% still visit their GP or accident and emergency with self-treatable conditions. Its research also found that 47% of people would not visit a pharmacist first for advice on a

self-treatable condition, with 18% claiming that that is because they do not think pharmacists are as qualified as doctors or A&Es.

It is clear that more needs to be done to educate people about the expertise of pharmacists—at this stage, I should say that I chair the all-party pharmacy group. My experience of the fitness of pharmacists to look after people without the need to bother doctors was not in this country. Many years ago, I was on holiday with my three young children in Spain. One of them fell ill and I asked the hotel staff how we could contact a doctor. They said, “Just go up the road to the pharmacist.” I went up to the pharmacist and it was extraordinary: we came away with the right medicines, which cured the condition pretty quickly and the holiday carried on.

I try to keep healthy myself, but that was the first time I had seen the expertise that pharmacists have and how they could help us. Pharmacists are expert health professionals who have a front-line role to play in giving people information and empowering them to take responsibility for their own health. I am sure the Minister agrees with that, as we have talked about pharmacies and the current situation with the pharmacy budget. He will be pleased to know that I will not bring that up today, but we have talked a lot about it. Better signposting to the pharmacy is necessary when we consider that 57 million people go to their GP and 3.7 million people go to A&E for ailments that only a few generations ago would have been safely treated at home with advice and medicines from a pharmacy.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough clinical commissioning group reported in March that, over the Easter period, people visited A&E with splinters, broken nails, paper cuts and hiccups. I am certain that that is not particular to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and that we would hear similar reports from A&E departments up and down the country. I know that about 50 people came along to my own CCG in Rotherham last year because they had toothache. I have no doubt that those people will have passed a local pharmacy where they could have bought some reasonably cheap pharmaceutical products to get rid of the toothache in the short term, and so not clog up the A&E.

People are clearly confused about when and how to use the NHS and need help in knowing where to go. I know that work is being done to improve the non-emergency helpline, NHS 111, which is important. Every day NHS 111 sends to GPs and to A&E people who could just go to a pharmacy without waiting and without an appointment to get the help that they need. We need to make sure that people receive a consistent message about self-care, whether they look at NHS Choices online, call NHS 111, visit a GP or speak to a pharmacist.

I know other hon. Members want to speak, so I will sum up by saying that more has to be done to address the escalating demand on the national health service, to combat the general confusion about where to go in the system and to improve people's ability to look after their own and their family's health. Excellent though it is, Self Care Week alone is not enough, as I suggested earlier. The local activities and events taking place during Self Care Week are definitely part of the solution to empowering people and addressing the demand on the national health service, but a bigger, more co-ordinated programme of work is essential if we are to move the self-care agenda along quicker.

Our all-party parliamentary group concluded earlier this year that we need a national strategy for self-help, led by a Government Minister and a national director to ensure implementation. It should be designed to co-ordinate policies across Government Departments and throughout the NHS and public health at the national and local level. It should be designed to empower people and should lead to a self-care culture and a behaviour change, so that people know not to go to A&E or to a general practitioner with their splinters, understand what steps to take to avoid serious conditions and know how to avoid hospital emergencies by managing long-term conditions. We would all agree that that is essential, but it does not happen very often. More than 70% of national health service expenditure in this country is on people with long-term conditions. People normally have more than one, of course, which sometimes seems difficult to grasp.

It seems to me that these issues are plain to everybody. We need to tackle them and to shape the national health service around long-term conditions, and not let the national health service shape us on how we should present to it. That needs radical thinking but, the Minister will be pleased to know, not legislation. I sat on a Committee back in 2010-11 that was suspended for a while because of the turmoil over the national health service reorganisation that was happening at the time, which is the last thing we want now. However, we want people in the health service and elsewhere to recognise that things ought to change and can change, and that legislation is not needed for that to happen. We need to make sure that we see a population that is able to self-care for life.

2.43 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. May I start by thanking the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) for bringing this timely debate, and also for his clear and detailed explanation of his position?

For my part, I supported Self Care Week last week by treating the latest winter cold I have picked up with a couple of lozenges and a few hot toddies. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) has set me a challenge to get through the debate without coughing; I have to confess I have failed already. However, I will repeat the dosage later on tonight.

We have heard that self-care is the act of looking after one's own physical or mental health, and that that extends to treating common illnesses with over-the-counter drugs and managing long-term conditions. We know that 80% of all care in the UK is actually self-care, and most people feel comfortable managing everyday minor ailments themselves, particularly when they feel confident that they have been successfully treated before using over-the-counter medicines.

Self-care is a fundamental part of healthcare—and Self Care Week provides an opportunity for us to encourage people to engage in self-care in a wide variety of areas—but it is important for us to get the balance right between managing conditions that are self-treatable and knowing when to get professional medical help. The right hon. Member for Rother Valley stated some examples in which it was clearly inappropriate to go to

[*Martyn Day*]

accident and emergency, and it is getting that balance right that we have to promote.

Self-care need not be as lonely as the term suggests. Often, conditions that can be self-managed are done so with support, be that from health professionals, organised support groups or advice from community pharmacies; people are not out there on their own with self-care. There are many good examples of such support across my constituency, covering a range of conditions and ailments. Eczema Outreach Scotland, which is based in Linlithgow, is a support charity for families affected by eczema. While it does not provide medical advice, it helps affected families in many ways, from practical advice to emotional support. As we know, one of the most common conditions experienced is joint pain, and the central arthritis self-help group, which meets in Grangemouth, organises outings, hydrotherapy and exercise sessions to assist sufferers.

Obviously, self-care for mental health is just as important as for physical conditions. In Bathgate, there is the West Lothian bipolar self-help group, which helps people affected by that common condition to share advice and insights on getting back into work and staying fit. Another example is the West Lothian health and social care partnership, which brings together NHS Lothian and West Lothian Council. It runs the superb “Eatright West Lothian” scheme, which aims to promote good nutrition and healthy eating, which can assist with many different conditions.

It is worth noting that the Self Care Forum recommended the following top tip:

“Involve the local pharmacists and community nurses in giving the same advice and support for self care; and work with the local pharmacists to ensure that their triage of common problems is similar to that in the practice.”

That is not quite the way I would have worded it, but I agree wholeheartedly; it is very good advice. Community pharmacists can only give out certain medicines and products, although the benefits of that can be massive, as it can cut the workload of GPs and other NHS staff across the country. The Scottish Pharmacy Board stated that, in 2015-16, more than one in 10 GP consultations and one in 20 A&E attendances could have been managed by community pharmacists utilising the minor ailment service.

Some 1,200 pharmacies throughout Scotland provide a range of services on behalf of the NHS. As well as dispensing prescriptions, they offer four new NHS pharmaceutical care services which have been gradually introduced since 2006—the minor ailment service, the public health service, the acute medication service and the chronic medication service. Those new services involve pharmacists in the community more in the provision of direct, patient-centred care, with every community pharmacy in Scotland having patients registered for the minor ailments service by 31 March 2015.

The minor ailment service allows people to get advice and free treatment on issues such as, but not exclusive to, acne, headaches, athlete’s foot, head lice, backache, indigestion, cold sores, mouth ulcers, constipation, nasal congestion, cough pain, diarrhoea, period pain, earache, thrush, allergies, sore throat, threadworms, hay fever, warts and verrucae; in fact, pretty much everything that is covered with self-care. Nearly 18% of the population

of Scotland are registered for the minor ailment service—a total of 913,483 people. More than 2.1 million items have been dispensed under it, accounting for some 2.2% of all items dispensed by community pharmacies in Scotland.

In Scotland, we recognise just how important community pharmacies are. The Scottish National party Scottish Government are helping to explore new ways for community pharmacies and other primary care services to aid self-care within our communities. The SNP Scottish Government are committed to supporting and developing local GP and primary care services, and have just announced a three-year, £85 million primary care fund to help to develop new ways of delivering healthcare in the community, which will involve pharmacists delivering aspects of patient care.

In conclusion, I welcome the recent words that we have heard from the UK Government that they want to copy the Scottish Government’s approach to community pharmacies and the minor ailment service. I thoroughly recommend that model to everyone, because we have found it to be very good and effective to date. I also welcome the opportunity to take part in today’s interesting and good-natured debate, which I hope will help to promote self-care further to the wider public audience.

2.49 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I welcome this important debate and the fact that it has been secured during Self Care Week—

Sir Kevin Barron: Just after it.

Mrs Hodgson: Just after Self Care Week. I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) for securing this debate and for his excellent speech, which shows his deep knowledge of and passion for all matters relating to the health of our nation, especially with regard to preventive health measures. I thank him for that.

This debate is especially important, as it is the first time we have had a dedicated debate on self-care in a very long time. We heard an excellent contribution from the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day). Before we hear from the Minister, I want to look at the issue of self-care and the wider picture of preventive measures through the lens of the cultural shift in the NHS away from care and repair to prevention and wellbeing promotion. I will also look at how aspects of current Government policy, such as the cuts to public health funding—I know I keep banging on about that, but it is important—is detrimental to our shared vision for an improved NHS and to achieving a healthier nation.

When NHS England’s “Five Year Forward View” was published just over two years ago, we were promised a radical upgrade in prevention and public health. That belief in reshaping the approach of the NHS and our health services away from a sickness alleviation service towards a wellbeing service that promotes healthier lifestyles choices, improved wellbeing and the prevention of ill health through behavioural change is supported across the NHS and in wider society.

That shift is paramount when we see the NHS in a state of crisis, with longer A&E waiting times and GP appointments becoming harder and harder to come by. One in four patients wait at least a week to see their GP. My husband had to wait three weeks to see the GP because it was not an emergency, but he thought it was an emergency; sometimes we do not know, and it is up to the doctor to decide what is important and what is not.

Some parts of the NHS are at crisis point. That is not a party political point at all; it is supported by health organisations such as the Nuffield Trust and the Health Foundation, which professed this time last year that the NHS was at risk of a “catastrophic collapse”. If the worrying trends in waiting times that I have described are ever to be reversed and we are to save the NHS, we need to have a wholesale rethink about the way we approach health policy. Prevention must be the key, and self-care should be a central part of that reconsidered approach.

Self-care is about empowering people and patients to maintain their own health through informed lifestyle choices, better awareness of symptoms and better awareness of when it is important to seek professional advice—for example, for possible cancer symptoms, where early diagnosis is absolutely crucial and a matter of life and death—and when an ailment can be treated by someone themselves in the appropriate manner by talking to their community pharmacist, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley described on the occasion of a family holiday. With improved confidence, people can take control of their own health or long-term conditions much better and make decisions that are far better for the NHS.

It is completely understandable that when we are unsure about the cause of symptoms or the best course of treatment or care, our first port of call is the NHS. However, being more aware of how we can treat ourselves and having preventive practices in place that reduce the prevalence of ill health will help go some way towards pulling the NHS back from the brink. The NHS is a trusted bastion, but sadly we are seeing more and more people accessing NHS services when there is no need and when a chat to one of our excellent community pharmacists would have sufficed—for example, in the cases we have heard about today of splinters, paper cuts, hiccups or broken nails. A bit of common sense is all that is needed, certainly not a trip to A&E.

In 2014, A&E departments across the country dealt with 3.7 million visits for self-treatable conditions such as those mentioned today, as well as the common cold, flu or muscle pain, combined with 52 million visits to the GP for similar conditions. It is no wonder people cannot get an appointment when some people are going to see their GP for that sort of thing. That has an estimated cost to the NHS of more than £10 billion over the past five years, which is not a small or insignificant amount of money.

Self-care is a crucial preventive measure that must be developed further to ensure that the NHS is as resilient as possible and can respond in more effective and meaningful ways to the nation’s health. With all that in mind, it is deeply worrying that the vision set out in the “Five Year Forward View” has progressed little or not at all. That is seen most clearly through the Making Every Contact Count initiative, which aims to make NHS staff members an important part of boosting

awareness of healthy living, rather than only administering healthcare to the sick. It is a fantastic initiative. In theory, that strategy can go far in addressing issues around lifestyle choices such as smoking, drugs, diet and alcohol consumption by just adding a one or two-minute conversation when a healthcare professional already has someone in front of them.

It is worrying that the progress and roll-out of that scheme is patchy, despite there being lots of good practice across the country, such as the social prescribing service in Rotherham that my right hon. Friend talked about. Where such system change is flourishing and showing that it can support a reduction in pressures on NHS services such as A&E and GP practices, it should be encouraged, and the roll-out should be far more substantial.

I hope the Minister can give us some reassurance on three key asks for the Make Every Contact Count initiative: first, that we see progress made on the scheme in the new year, as promised by Professor Fenton from Public Health England during the second oral evidence session for the APPG on primary care and public health inquiry; secondly, that best practice is made more readily available to improve provision across the country through the Self Care Forum’s database of best practice; and thirdly, that he commits to ensuring CCGs prioritise implementation of the scheme in their local areas and that training is provided for staff, to equip them to provide consistent self-care messaging.

It should not go without saying that there are examples across the country that show the innovative and positive impacts of improving self-care, such as a scheme in my own neck of the woods in South Tyneside—the neighbouring borough to my own—where a borough-wide conversation has been developed that shifts away from asking, “How can I help you?” and instead asks, “How can I help you to help yourself?”

Those initiatives need funding and encouraging from Government to succeed. However, what we are currently seeing has been described as a frustrating and perverse approach to preventive measures, with cuts to public health funding of £200 million in last year’s Budget, along with an average real-terms cut of 3.9% each year to 2021, announced in last year’s autumn statement. Hopefully tomorrow we will see our new Chancellor go some way to rectifying and reversing that; we can live in hope, unless the Minister has some insight into what the Chancellor will announce. We will keep our fingers crossed.

The Minister is well aware of my opinion on those cuts, because we discuss them every time we meet, and the need to rethink the whole approach, but it is not only me saying this. Only recently, the Health Committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston)—who I am sure would have been here today if not for the health debate coming up in the Chamber very soon—uncovered serious concerns about the finances and funding of the NHS and public health. In a letter to the Health Secretary in October, the Committee said:

“All the indicators suggest that demand is continuing to grow and that we need to go further on prevention”.

I could not agree more. These cuts are a false economy and are exacerbating the situation within our health services. We are seeing funding directed to our crisis-ridden A&E departments, which are having to crisis-manage failures that could have been addressed a lot sooner.

[Mrs Hodgson]

The Minister needs fully to understand that to make cuts to one part of our health service without considering the impact on other parts is leading us down the road to rack and ruin. To give him some understanding of the cuts, I suggest that he look at the Health Committee report “Public health post-2013”. The Select Committee does good work, but the Chair is not here to hear me highlight all this work. The report that I have just mentioned highlights research by the Association of Directors of Public Health, which found that local authorities are planning deep cuts to public health services due to the cuts coming from central Government to local authorities. It shows a marked rise for 2016-17 compared with 2015-16.

The Government need to have a wholesale rethink of the funding of the NHS and public health services that sees a redirection to prevention, which will go some way towards addressing many of the problems in our health service that are now being documented weekly. I hope that the Minister takes some time in his response to consider the points that I have raised in relation to public health funding and how current actions are failing the vision of the five year forward view and the health of our nation. Self-care needs properly to be funded and supported to be innovative, so that we ensure that the continuing crisis facing the NHS can be reversed. We cannot continue as we are, because our NHS is too precious to let it fail. The health of the nation needs to be protected, where possible, to enable people to lead long, happy and fulfilling lives.

3.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): First, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) both on leading the charge on this issue and on his work in the APPG. This has been a shortish debate, but there were very good speeches from all hon. Members. In fact, I agreed with much if not all of the speech given by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), and I will come on to that.

The right hon. Member for Rother Valley rightly talked about the impact that self-care needs to have on demand in the health service. He used a very important phrase that is spot on: in the course of his remarks, he asked why we are not doing more to try to shape the NHS around long-term conditions, given that, as he rightly said, some 70% to 80% of total NHS expenditure relates to long-term conditions, such as diabetes, chronic pain and dementia. As he also rightly said, increased longevity means that more and more people are living with more and more of those conditions. We need to deal with long-term conditions—this relates to a point made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day)—on a preventive basis, on a care plan basis, and not necessarily on an ad hoc, repair basis; I think that was the word that he used. Those points are spot on and are why we need to continue to do better in the whole area of self-care.

It is worth reflecting on why, in many ways, the moment for self-care has arrived. The Self Care Forum has been doing a lot of work in this area for a number of years, but I think that there are several reasons why

self-care is particularly critical at the moment. One is demography. We are getting older. That is a good thing, but the consequence is that about 1 million more people aged over 75 will be around in 2025. We will have more long-term conditions. That is just a natural feature of ageing. Those long-term conditions are precisely where self-care gives us the biggest bang for our buck, because there is absolutely no need to continue going to see the GP all the time. People have talked about pharmacies, and I will talk about that.

Another reason is that there is a general perception in the population that people are more empowered vis-à-vis their own health and what they will accept from health professionals. We often hear of people saying, “Well, it’s not a question any more of the doctor telling me what I should do, but of having a discussion with the doctor about that.” Where that takes us to, in terms of our expectations of the health service, is a whole load of things around choice and, in particular, personalisation. Self-care also has a role to play in that. Part of it is about not just clinical outcomes, which is where we have come from historically, but out-turns that consider the general wellbeing of an individual.

The right hon. Member for Rother Valley made the point about social prescribing as a big part of that, and it absolutely is. Increasingly, it is important not just that patients with diabetes manage glucose levels and all that goes with that, but that they exercise. It might be just as appropriate for them to be referred to a football team or to talk to someone else with diabetes, in a mentor group. Frankly, social prescribing needs to be commissioned by CCGs as much as some of the clinical things that have happened in the past.

Another area that has made self-care even more prominent, and which is a component of it, is technology. We have not talked yet about technology, but there is a lot more out there. It ranges from people just being able to look at Google, see what is wrong with them and take a view—that can be dangerous and is not always to be recommended, but nevertheless it empowers people in a way that did not exist at one time—to some 900,000 applications to do with health and fitness that have been developed. I believe that iTunes alone has 47,000 health apps. People who are interested in all that stuff—and possibly more IT literate than I am—can use all those, and they do. The combination of those things has meant that the whole ethos of “Doctor knows best” is giving way to much more of a dialogue and a care plan orientation, and a big part of that care plan will be self-care.

What is the Government’s response? That is the challenge that we received from the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West. I suppose there are two areas. There is the whole general area of public health. I will not get into a discussion about the relative size of budgets and all the rest of it, other than to say that the Opposition’s position on where we should spend more money versus less money in the health service and anywhere else would be stronger if occasionally they agreed that in some areas it is right to spend less in order to spend more in other areas. If their position is that we must always spend more money on everything, their comments may be taken by Ministers with a bit more of a pinch of salt. I merely say that in passing.

In terms of awareness and education, the right hon. Member for Rother Valley made a good point, which I had not thought of, about health education in schools

being a step up from other types of education. There does need to be more awareness, and I will mention a small thing that I became aware of recently. One of my responsibilities is dementia, and I had not realised that obesity is a major factor in someone's likelihood of getting dementia. I know that now, and perhaps everyone else in the Chamber also knows it, but I suspect that many people do not; I do not think why obesity and dementia go together is that intuitive. That is an example of the need for awareness.

Let me talk about the sorts of things that the Government need to encourage and are encouraging. We have a campaign on stopping smoking—Stoptober. We have “Everybody Active, Every Day” and Change4Life, which involve people taking control of their diet and how they live. I talked about dementia, and there is the dementia friends initiative. There are some 1.7 million dementia friends now. Dementia has become the condition that most people die of in the UK, and dealing with that will be a real challenge in the years ahead.

That is about public health, but we have a whole stack of things to do with clinical outcomes. We have put into the NHS mandate a clear requirement for it to improve its response to long-term conditions, with a clear requirement for self-care to be part of that. That includes the need for more personal health budgets. Some 4,000 people now have a personal health budget; those budgets are analogous to personal care budgets. Our target for 2020 is between 50,000 and 100,000 people having such budgets. That is about choice and about control. Various tools are available for patient activation and to help patients understand the sorts of choices they can make day to day. NHS England has a target of 1.8 million people accessing tools, as well as being assessed on where they see themselves on the self-care spectrum and what they are doing about it.

It is worth talking briefly about the STP process. The shadow Minister made the point that we spend too much on acute healthcare in this country and not enough on primary care, on mental health and on the self-care options that we are talking about, including pharmacy, which I will talk about. The STP process is a precise attempt to make self-care happen in a structured bottom-up way. If the Opposition oppose the STP process at every turn, as opposed to acting as critical friends, which is how all MPs should act, they oppose what could be some very sensible, thought through and locally driven reforms to healthcare that may well result in higher budgets for prevention, which is a point that she made, and a tilt away from our spending so much of our budgets on secondary care and hospitals, which are very expensive.

NHS England has produced a book about self-care that was printed last week. “Realising the value” is about empowering people to make their own decisions about medicine and care and engaging in the community. There is a lot in the book, which was produced by Nesta, that is valuable and good. I guess it is an attempt to embed some of the things that we have been talking about. National Voices, the Health Foundation and voluntary organisations were involved in it.

Social prescribing is a large part of the initiative, which is about peer groups and making sure that people who have a diabetes issue are not overwhelmed by concerns about losing a limb and about glucose levels changing. It is about managing all of those types of

things and ensuring people look at their own diet and at whether they are doing enough exercise or sport and are in a group of like-minded people with the same issues. If I were diagnosed with diabetes, it would be valuable to me to talk to people who had had it for a few years. That is as valuable as going to see the doctor and his telling me what I should be doing.

The right hon. Member for Rother Valley made the point that roll out is patchy. In truth, many things are patchy. All we can do in the centre is try to encourage CCGs to consider the advantages of what they have in terms of their own business case: a reduction in the number of visits to GPs and so on.

On the role of pharmacy, the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk rightly said that I was on record as saying that we have something to learn from where Scotland is in pharmacy. I will say it again: I think we have. We are doing our own review in England—the Murray review—of the services we want to see in pharmacies over the next few years. I have absolutely no hesitation or compunction in saying we could learn from Scotland. I do not take a “not invented here” view. A phrase I always used at work was “steal with pride”. If there are bits in the Scottish model that we can take and steal, we will.

On the direction of travel, the right hon. Member for Rother Valley chairs the APPG and he knows my view is that we need to move pharmacies away from predominantly dispensing and being paid for dispensing into a model with many more services in it. That is what we are determined to do. As we go through the process, that is what we will do. A fund of £300 million between now and 2020 has been set up. There is a lot of opportunity, and the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk gave us some examples. We have announced two things already: the urgent medicine supply service and NHS 111. If someone is out of medicine, particularly if they have a long-term condition and have not had their prescription revalidated, NHS 111 has historically told them to go and see an out-of-hours GP or even an A&E service in order to meet a doctor to get the problem sorted. We are changing the script so that 200,000 calls a year will be directed to pharmacies, which will be empowered to make a judgment about the patient and will write the prescription and dispense the medicine. That is a big change and that is exactly where we need to go.

We heard from the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk about the national minor ailments scheme. In England, we are now committed to rolling that out nationally by April 2018 so that the list of minor ailments that the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk talked about will be treated in pharmacies in England. The pharmacist will be paid separately for the consultation and any dispensing that comes from it.

Another service-based activity in pharmacies was announced two weeks ago by Simon Stevens: the sore throat pilot. Pharmacists can do a test to determine whether someone's sore throat is a bacterial or a viral issue. If it is bacterial, they will send someone to a doctor so that they can have antibiotics prescribed. If it is viral, they will not. As that service is rolled out nationally, it will save 800,000 GP consultations a year, but this all also relies on awareness and all that goes with that.

[David Mowat]

Diabetes self-care is a big area on which we can make progress. Diabetes is a growing problem and people will benefit greatly from individual care plans and social prescribing. We have changed the GP contract so that when GPs identify type 1 or type 2 diabetes, they put the person on a structured education course. GPs are now being paid for the numbers of people they get on to such courses. A big part of those education courses is explaining better to people how they can self-care.

I was going to talk about technology—I have probably spoken for long enough, but perhaps I will deal with some of the various points that were made. The right hon. Member for Rother Valley asked about the personal allowance in care homes, which he is right to say was not uprated. I will get back to him on the rationale for that. I suspect the reason is, as we know, that the care sector is under financial pressure. However, the money was not cut, but went to the rest of the adult social care budget. A judgment has to be made about what is adequate and where money is best spent, but I will write to him with a fuller answer to his question.

The right hon. Member for Rother Valley also talked about the need for a national strategy on self-care. I have been a Minister for about four months now. My general learning point would be that we need fewer strategies and more implementable plans, and I suspect the right hon. Gentleman would agree. We need to do things, and there are some things that are quite sensible. I have talked about some of them, but they need to happen. We need to go further and faster.

I agreed with much of what the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West said. She talked about a wholesale rethink, which is what we are trying to do with the STP process. The Opposition would do well to not necessarily oppose every part of that, but to act as critical friends, as all MPs must. She made good points about making every contact count. She talked a lot about common sense, which I completely agree with. I guess she will not be surprised to know that I am not going to talk to her about the autumn statement; all I will say on money is that the UK now spends more on health as a proportion of GDP than the OECD average. It is about one percentage point less than France and Germany; that is about where we are, and it is clearly critical that we look properly at every area of expenditure and maximise its value. I believe we did so with pharmacy, and we are trying to do it with the STPs, as regards the difference between secondary care and primary care.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk made the point that in the thrust towards self-care—which is right—we must still be careful to say that people sometimes need to see a doctor. Sometimes there is something serious wrong. Too many people go to the doctor too often with trivial things; but on the other hand people do not always know when they have the initial symptom of something serious—it can be something that looks benign, or a lump or something. It is important to understand that GPs are there to look after such things. We need to be aware of that in the drive towards self-care. I thank the hon. Members who spoke in the debate.

3.20 pm

Sir Kevin Barron: The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) and my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) mentioned groups in their areas that help people with long-term conditions, and those are a resource that we should use. My hon. Friend spoke about prevention, and that is right; we need it. The need for the NHS and taxpayers' money will never stop if we cannot turn around the health of the nation. Population health is something we must attend to.

As for the minor ailment scheme that the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk described, we have one in my area; I hope that they will be rolled out nationally. However, I wonder how many people know that really they should go to the pharmacist. Pharmacies are open all the time—at the weekend as well—but people drive past them to the A&E. We need to look at that issue.

The Minister spoke about health education and there is no doubt in my mind about it: as a Rotherham MP I know about the problems caused by not having good sex education and, more importantly, personal relationship education in our system. We have it now, having gone through the awful child sexual exploitation experience of practically two decades in Rotherham. It seems to me that it is also important to have continuing health education, including educating people about the system and where to engage with it.

On sustainability and transformation, on Friday morning this week the Rotherham MPs will have a meeting with the lead person on the issue from South Yorkshire, Sir Andrew Cash. On 16 December we will visit a pilot scheme running in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). There is a group of 30 patients and two or three GP surgeries who are working with other health professionals in the acute and primary sectors, and other organisations such as Voluntary Action Rotherham, which runs social prescribing. They are going to run a pilot to see how well it is possible to look after people and improve population health.

I do not want to get dragged too far on to this point, but the Minister talked about referring people with long-term conditions to football teams. I hope that is not a slight on Rotherham United, which is at the bottom of the championship at the moment, some eight points adrift, as it were. I have been a supporter for nearly 60 years and will continue to be one, but I think now and again one or two of them might have some problems that need sorting out—with the pharmacist or others.

We have had a short but good debate, in which we recognised that self-care and preventive healthcare will be crucial to the future of the nation and its people.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Self Care Week 2016.

3.24 pm

Sitting suspended.

Heathrow Expansion: Air Quality

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect on air quality of proposed Heathrow airport expansion.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. As you and the Minister are aware, I have spent much time in Parliament on the issues of Heathrow and Heathrow expansion because many of my constituents in Twickenham are concerned. It is therefore a great disappointment to me that the Government recently decided to support Heathrow expansion, and I reiterate that I am still firmly and utterly opposed to that decision.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady, my constituency neighbour, on securing this debate. I alert the House that many MPs for constituencies in and around Heathrow airport have constituents who are worried about the implications of the proposed expansion and about air quality, which is increasingly important locally.

Dr Mathias: I thank the hon. Lady for making that important point, as this not only affects Twickenham. Four councils are currently taking the Government to court over air quality because of Heathrow. Air quality is an important concern for many people.

The people, like the hon. Lady, know that Heathrow is not deliverable on many levels, including cost, noise pollution and the upcoming legal challenges, but the insurmountable challenge, and the reason I secured this debate, is air quality. The Minister will know that air quality is a major and increasing concern, and he may recall that in January 2016 I asked the then Prime Minister about the shocking news that the annual legal limit for nitrogen dioxide had been breached in London by 8 January. A map of nitrogen dioxide levels across London and Heathrow shows high concentrations in central London and Heathrow. Nitrogen dioxide, of course, affects the lungs, particularly in people with asthma or bronchial conditions, and decreases lung function growth in children.

Perhaps of even more concern is particulate matter. I am sure the Minister is aware of the World Health Organisation's comments on particulate matter, which affects more people than any other pollutant. Although I will be talking about the legal limits for PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀, I remind him that the WHO has said that for PM_{2.5}

“no threshold has been identified below which no damage to health is observed.”

There is no safe level but, just like for nitrogen dioxide, London breached the annual legal limit in the first few months of this year. Forty cities in the United Kingdom have already breached the annual legal limit for PM_{2.5}, and London is in the top six. PM₁₀ is also of serious concern. Only 11 cities in the United Kingdom breached the annual legal limit in the early part of this year, and London is in the top four.

Particulate matter contributes to fatalities from strokes, heart disease, lung cancer and acute and chronic respiratory diseases. The cost in human terms is that 9,000 deaths a year in Greater London are attributable to nitrogen dioxide or particulate matter, which are just some of the air pollutants. Four thousand deaths in 1952 gave rise to the Clean Air Act 1956. Now we have more than double that number every year, and the Government are not doing enough.

What concerns me is that, within just over a week of the Government being found guilty in the courts of not having an adequate plan to address air quality, they decided to approve Heathrow expansion. The expansion will involve perhaps 50% more planes. The Minister might say that it is not the aircraft but the cars that are adding to the air pollutants, but Heathrow lies near the M4 and the M25, two of the country's most congested motorways. He will also know that, with nearly 250,000 more flights planned, there will be thousands more passengers and staff, and they will not be walking to and from Heathrow airport.

The number of cars will increase, and I do not agree or accept that electric cars will be the answer. There are 11 million diesel cars in the United Kingdom, and they will not be scrapped and replaced in time for the proposed Heathrow expansion. I do not want to hear that putting on facemasks will protect us from particulate matter, because the British Lung Foundation says that there is no evidence that that will help.

Heathrow implicitly acknowledges the risk to air quality. I am sure the Minister has a well-thumbed copy of the Airports Commission report, and page 225 states that £799 million will be spent on car parks at an expanded Heathrow. That will increase air pollutants, which are already breaching legal limits. Heathrow Airport Holdings Ltd will argue about how much it wants to spend on surface access—that is one argument—but nobody who favours Heathrow expansion denies that surface access will increase, which means more road trips and more pollutants.

Ruth Cadbury: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Mathias: I will in a while, if I have time.

Heathrow airport prides itself on being a leading cargo airport. Again, cargo and freight are not coming to and from Heathrow in an electric car or on a horse and cart. My question to the Minister is simple: if the Government support Heathrow expansion, how will they get air quality within legal targets? I have asked two Prime Ministers, two Secretaries of State for Transport and a Minister from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how they can expand Heathrow airport without increasing air pollution. Thus far, I have been assured that it will happen, but I have not been told how. I hope that today, at the sixth time of asking, I will be told.

Howard Davies spent years and millions of pounds of taxpayers' money on his commission's report, and he said on page 307 of the Minister's well-thumbed copy that

“an expanded Heathrow Airport must be contingent on acceptable performance on air quality.”

Howard Davies said that that was needed but, again, the report did not specify how it would be achieved. We need airport expansion, but it must be in a place where the legal limits for air pollution have not been breached.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate; she is making a compelling case. The overwhelming body of legal and expert opinion on environmental and transport matters is that it is not sustainable. Does she agree that it is a welcome sign that the Mayor of London has put the resources of TfL behind the campaign, and will support all of us who are campaigning to ensure that Heathrow does not expand, because of that particular risk?

Dr Mathias: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that absolutely brilliant point. I would think that the Mayor of London supporting the campaign would focus the minds of the Minister and the Cabinet, because four councils—Richmond, Wandsworth, Hillingdon and Windsor and Maidenhead—are taking the Government to court for noise and air pollution as a result of the proposed Heathrow expansion. Ministers have a chance to change their minds and deliver runway capacity in an area where air pollution is not so critical. No other place in the United Kingdom is as vulnerable as the area around Heathrow, close to Greater London.

If the Government continue to support Heathrow expansion without a plan to reduce air pollution to within safe medical and legal limits—it must be done in a critical time frame, as ClientEarth told the Government in the Supreme Court and the High Court—I will ask the Government to admit that they are wilfully and knowingly increasing the number of deaths attributable to air pollution caused by an expanded Heathrow.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Before I invite the Minister to respond, I warn him that I am likely to interrupt his speech if a Division is called in the House.

4.12 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes): It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I am pleased to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) on securing this debate. She has been a regular, repeated and determined advocate for the case that she makes today.

The Government are straightforward about our plans, as my hon. Friend made clear in her speech. The Secretary of State has announced the steps that we are taking in respect of Heathrow, which she has drawn to the House's attention, but in doing so, the Secretary of State was absolutely clear that it will now be subject to a consultation, that it will be gauged according to that consultation and that the Government are committed to the interests of local people, just as we are committed to the interests of people who wish to travel to and from Heathrow. Of course, she is right to suggest that squaring those two objectives is a significant challenge, but it is one that the Government are willing to meet.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Does the Minister agree that airport expansion can cause pollution not only from aircraft but from traffic going to the airport? We need many more electric cars, and we need to ensure that public transport runs not on diesel but on petrol or hybrid. What are the Government doing about that particular situation?

Mr Hayes: It is apposite that my hon. Friend, with his usual insight and judgment, should raise that matter. Just this morning, I gave evidence to the Lords Science and Technology Committee, which is producing a report on exactly that subject. The Committee asked telling questions about the pace of those developments, their character and what social and environmental effects they might have.

Dr Mathias: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hayes: I will in a second, after I finish this point. I was able to orate at considerable but not excessive length on all those matters. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) will have a chance to see the report. In addition, because I always like to go that one step further than other Ministers, I will drop him a line summarising, given that I know his interest in these matters—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Minister; he can continue his remarks when we resume. A Division has been called in the House. If there is one Division, the sitting will be suspended until 4.30; if there are two, we will resume at 4.40, and the Minister can continue his remarks then.

4.15 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.30 pm

On resuming—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. The sitting is resumed. Those Members who are here for the debate on the electrification of the great western line are 15 minutes early, because we are 15 minutes behind schedule because of the Division. You are most welcome to stay; you may learn something about air quality at Heathrow. The Division rudely interrupted the Minister, whom I invite to resume his remarks.

Mr Hayes: Those who were present earlier had the excitement of hearing the beginning of my speech; those who have joined us rather later are going to have the excitement of the peroration. It is almost like having two bites of the cherry for those who have been here throughout.

Before the sitting was suspended briefly, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton had asked me about electric vehicles. I do not want to go down that road, and I do not think you would permit me to do so, Mr Hollobone; it is sufficient for me to say that I will write to him, summarising the evidence I gave to the Lords Science and Technology Committee this morning to better inform further consideration of that important matter.

Dr Mathias: Although I absolutely applaud electric cars, there are 11 million diesel cars. The point is the timeframe. I do not believe that the Government will move to all cars being electric, with no air pollution, in the timeframe within which they want Heathrow expansion, which cannot take place with air quality levels as they are.

Mr Hayes: I would not claim for a moment, and have not done so, that we are going to have an entirely electric fleet of cars, privately owned or otherwise, in

the near future. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend's intervention is reasonable, given that that is a factor that will affect the way we drive in future, with a consequent effect on emissions.

Dr Mathias *rose*—

Mr Hayes: I do not want to have a great debate on this matter, but I shall give way again.

Dr Mathias: Does the Minister agree that because air pollution is at such a dire, illegal level, complete electrification is the only way we will be able to get safe levels in future?

Mr Hayes: My hon. Friend clearly has greater prophetic powers than I do. I would never want to have claimed to have second-guessed the whole of the future. Technological change is, by its nature, unpredictable, and the circumstances we currently face are highly dynamic. We know that electric vehicles are here and established. The numbers being driven are growing and the Government support that. I fully anticipate that number continuing to grow significantly. It will affect emissions accordingly, but there will be other technological changes in the near, medium and longer term, and they are likely to make cars more efficient. Frankly, I suspect that those changes are also likely to have a beneficial effect on emissions. As I say, though, far be it from me to be a prophet in those terms; I simply try to do my best to estimate what is happening now. It is difficult enough to do that, let alone to be more ambitious.

I turn, in the short time available, to my hon. Friend's salient remarks—salient in the sense that they are relevant to the debate in a rather stricter way than the territory into which we were just straying. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced the decision on the north-west runway at Heathrow—as a preferred option, I hasten to add—in the following context. He said that, among other things, expanding Heathrow will better connect the UK to long-haul destinations in growing world markets, boosting trade and creating jobs. Passengers will benefit from more choice of airlines, destinations and flights, and expansion at Heathrow will be subject to a world-class package of compensation and supporting measures for local communities. My right hon. Friend also made it clear that the Government's announcement was just the beginning of the consultative process I described earlier, which will allow my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham and others in the community and elsewhere to make their views known.

Let me be clear on the impact of the expansion. The Government's commitment to dealing with emissions will be central to the discussion of the air-quality impact and to meeting the challenge of balancing the need to grow airports with the need to maintain the health and wellbeing of the people who live near them, and of all our people. We have made it clear that we must tackle air quality and noise and meet our obligations on carbon, both during and after construction of the expanded airport.

Dr Mathias: I greatly appreciate the Minister's giving way again. Will he confirm whether I am correct in concluding that if the consultation shows that air pollution levels cannot be brought within legal limits, Heathrow expansion will not take place?

Mr Hayes: It would be entirely inappropriate of me to prejudge the consultation, still less its outcome, as my hon. Friend invites me to do. Nevertheless, given her absolute consistency and vehemence in defence of the cause she has identified today, I shall give her my 10-point summary of the issues. Ten points is the very least she deserves, given her consistency.

First, air quality is a significant national health issue, as my hon. Friend says, and the Government take it seriously. However, she knows that the prevailing issues of air quality associated with an urban environment—indeed, those associated with the kind of cars we drive and how that is changing—are the most significant feature of some of the public health arguments that she made earlier. We should not be preoccupied with assuming that airport expansion is the be all and end all in this, and I am sure she is not so preoccupied.

Secondly, the Government are already taking action to cut vehicle emissions. For example, the UK is delivering a programme, backed by £600 million of investment, to support the long-term transition to low-emission vehicles, to which I referred a moment ago.

Thirdly, the Department for Transport, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Treasury have already embarked on a joint project to identify further ways in which we can tackle this issue. Indeed, if the consultation goes that way, by the time a new runway opens in the next decade we intend to have made substantial progress in tackling air-quality challenges throughout the whole nation.

Fourthly, as announced in December 2015, we tested the Airports Commission's analysis against the Government's 2015 air quality plan. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend is right that the evidence base in this policy area is ever shifting, and we do need to recognise that there is more work to do; I happily do so today. We have to keep our assessments up to date and to take account of changing technology and what that brings.

Fifthly, Heathrow airport will have to play its part. The new runway must be underpinned by further industry-leading measures to mitigate air quality impacts.

Sixthly—I am rattling through these points because I am conscious of the time, Mr Hollobone, and this Chamber deserves as much information as possible—the Government believe that, with a suitable package of policies and mitigation measures, the Heathrow north-west runway scheme can be delivered without impacting on the UK's compliance with air quality limit values.

Seventhly, final development consent will be granted only if the Secretary of State is satisfied that, with mitigation, the Heathrow scheme is compliant with legal requirements on air quality. I do not think that is quite what my hon. Friend asked for—as I say, I do not want to prejudge the consultation—but she must be pleased with what I have said today; she would be churlish not to be.

Dr Mathias: The Minister is being very generous in taking interventions. Will he confirm that, after all these measures are taken, if air quality levels are illegal, the beginning of any construction for a third runway at Heathrow cannot and will not take place?

Mr Hayes: For the sake of clarity, I will repeat exactly what I said for the record. Final development consent will only be granted if the Secretary of State is satisfied that, with mitigation, the Heathrow scheme is compliant

[*Mr John Hayes*]

with legal requirements on air quality. Whether that is quite what my hon. Friend wants or not, I do not know, but I think that is quite a big commitment to make and it is certainly made in the spirit that I described earlier—that of a Government who are absolutely concerned to do the right thing by local residents and in terms of emissions generally.

Dr Mathias rose—

Ruth Cadbury rose—

Mr Hayes: I will give way briefly to the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury).

Ruth Cadbury: I thank the Minister for giving way. Last week at Transport questions, I asked a question about an issue that concerns my local area, which is the proposed expansion of the M4, which, so far as I can see, would be needed if the third runway is given the go-ahead. Will the Minister comment on the impact on air quality of a tunnel coming up either in Brentford or Chiswick?

Mr Hayes: Yes. Among my many responsibilities, although I know that Members in this Chamber think that they are too few, are big roads, and the M4 is indeed a big road. However, it is important to point out that in any expansion that takes place at Heathrow, a range of transport connections would be considered. I know that Heathrow is considering how people would get to and from the airport. That will not just be by car. The hon. Lady will know that about 45% of people currently make their journey to and from Heathrow by private vehicle, but that number is not fixed in stone. One would hope that—indeed, I would expect it to be so as part of this package—all kinds of innovative solutions will be delivered as to how people can get to the airport efficiently.

Therefore, I do not want to prejudge that issue and I certainly would not want either to say anything that contradicted the answer that the hon. Lady received last week, because the question then was not posed to me; I think it was posed to the Secretary of State. I reassure the hon. Lady that we are broad-minded about the means by which people get to and from Heathrow and the effects that might have on local people.

Let me make my last three points, because I promised 10 points and so far I have delivered only seven. The Government have also made it clear that we must tackle noise and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham is also concerned about this. We will also meet our obligations on carbon. On noise, Heathrow

Airport Holdings Ltd has committed to a ban on scheduled night flights of six and a half hours, more predictable periods of respite for communities and new and binding noise targets.

Ninthly, the Government's announcement was just the beginning, as I said, of the process, as the preferred scheme will now be subject for consultation through a draft airports national policy statement that will follow in the new year. Of course, that is something to look forward to after the excitement of Christmas.

Finally, it is important to point out—I know that my hon. Friend is very conscious of this and I thought she deserved an answer on it—that the Government accept the recent High Court judgment that more needs to be done to improve the nation's air quality. That does not apply simply to airports; I am looking at a range of transport modes, as she will doubtless appreciate. I can tell her that the Government will produce a revised plan by 31 July 2017 and my team in the Department for Transport are beavering away and working with other relevant Departments to make sure that the plan meets all the necessary requirements.

Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hayes: I think I have only two minutes left, but what a delight it is to give way to my hon. Friend.

Jonathan Lord: I thank the Minister for giving way. Many experts, commentators and indeed Members of this House feel that the air quality projections made to date have been somewhat fanciful, including a large dose of wishful thinking. Can he reassure us that there is anything in the next year's worth of consultation that will be more robust, and that the Government will take note of what many experts are saying?

Mr Hayes: I can give an absolute assurance that while I am the Minister of State at the Department for Transport all that we do will be studious and robust, and that includes the considerations of the kind that my hon. Friend has identified. It is important that we do the work to produce an evidential argument and also articulate that argument in a way that sends the public a very clear message—this Government are serious about transport and about wellbeing. All that we do in the Department, while I have influence over it, will be gauged by wellbeing and the effect that it has on the national interest and the common good.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the effect on air quality of proposed Heathrow airport expansion.

Great Western Line: Electrification

4.45 pm

Charlotte Leslie (Bristol North West) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered electrification of the Great Western line.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. This is a debate that I never wanted to have to bring to the House and I am sure that many other Members felt the same. In doing so, I acknowledge that the Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard)—is relatively new to his post and that many of the problems I am highlighting will be ones that he has inherited. I also acknowledge that he has been and remains a formidable constituency MP, as well as now being a great Minister, so I hope that he will forgive many of us for expressing passionately the views and interests of our constituents. That goes to the heart of why I called for this debate, because I am sure that there are those somewhere who will say, “What is an MP for Bristol North West doing having this debate?” Neither Bristol Parkway nor Bristol Temple Meads are in my constituency, so some will say, “Well, she’s not affected by this.” However, anyone who says that an MP like me is not affected by this issue misunderstands fundamentally the nature of transport and the nature of our railways in particular.

Our railways are not simply stretches of iron rail in the location where they are constituted; they are the circulation system, if you will, of our regions, our communities and indeed our entire nation. If something happens to one part of that circulation system, it has wide-reaching effects and impacts on the body as a whole.

I applied for this debate because of deep concern about the recent Government announcement of the deferral of electrification, which yet again appears to leave the south-west region trailing behind other parts of the country in terms of transport infrastructure investment.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I am sorry to interrupt her so very early in her speech. I know that most of the speeches in the Chamber this afternoon will be about the problems and the deferral of electrification. However, would it not be gracious to say that 10 years ago there was no prospect whatever of electrification anywhere to the west of London? We should be glad that this Conservative Government have delivered electrification as far as Chippenham—in my constituency, or just outside it—and that we have quite a few things to be grateful for, albeit that we also have a few problems.

Charlotte Leslie: It is always a profound joy to give way to my hon. Friend. If he had waited for a small amount of time before intervening, I would have come to that point. However, since he has made that case, I can skip over some of my speech, because it is a very valid point. We do not want to let the best become the enemy of the good and I want to acknowledge where we are.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I do not want to dispute the hon. Gentleman’s maths, but given that the decision to electrify the railway was made in 2009, which is less than 10 years ago, I beg to differ with what has just been said.

Charlotte Leslie: The hon. Lady also anticipates something that I will raise in my speech. Whichever Government want to make dramatic railway infrastructure improvements, they face challenges. Whether a Labour Minister or a Conservative Minister was sitting in the Minister’s chair here, I suspect that the challenges involved in delivering what they want to do could be very similar. I will come back to that point in my speech.

I am afraid that all south-west MPs might agree that, when we see the bills for HS2 soaring to £42 billion, the deferral of our meagre-by-comparison £5 billion project is particularly hard to swallow, especially since the south-west has consistently been among the bottom regions in the league tables for regional spend per capita.

The south-west is a region that boasts exciting opportunities, that is incredibly fast-growing, and that desperately needs the kind of focus on rail investment that we have seen with HS2 and Crossrail. So, forgive me, Minister, if I say for the south-west that, when it comes to seeing actual infrastructure—not promised but built—many people in the region feel that it is now our turn.

Nevertheless, returning to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray), raised, there have been improvements and the Government are making efforts. I must also be fair about the context of this debate. I recognise that, this deferral notwithstanding, the region will still receive, which it might not have received otherwise, 5,000 extra seats on journeys into London at peak time. Most of us have made that journey, so we know that those seats will be welcome. We have been promised new trains, which will deliver faster journeys. We are told that there will be station improvements down the line. However, I hope that the Minister will forgive me for being honest and saying that, given the recent announcement of the deferral, we will believe these things when we see them. I would also appreciate a bit more clarity in the Minister’s response about the exact tangible benefits we will get in return for what has been a hard blow in the form of the announcement of deferral.

As I said, the improvements are welcome, and I do not want to be ungracious by denying that. However, major concerns remain about what the decision says about how we do big infrastructure projects and I will be asking the Minister specific questions. If he is not able to answer them today, I would deeply appreciate a detailed written response.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): I want to pick up on my hon. Friend’s earlier point about the south-west not always being at the front of the queue for such things. Bristol is, I think, the fastest-growing core city outside London, and therefore has a huge economic benefit to bring to the country. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is strange, therefore, that other areas have been given preference on the list for electrification? The deferral also includes the deferral of some of the Thames valley commuter lines and some of the lines to

[John Penrose]

Oxford. Would it not now be sensible to re-examine the business case for the electrification of some of the lines radiating out from Bristol, on the basis that the economic case for Bristol's economic zone must make it more attractive? That would go some way towards addressing the relatively low priority that Bristol and the south-west have previously been afforded.

Charlotte Leslie: If *Hansard* could kindly ascribe my hon. Friend's comments to me I would be very grateful, because that is exactly the point I want to make. Yes, it does seem strange. It plays to a historical view that the south-west is always overlooked. I do not understand why we seem to have been axed when other places still seem to be a political priority. On the economic arguments, that does not make sense.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): It is not just the south-west that has been axed from the great western line electrification. I had hoped to be able to contribute to the earlier debate about air quality around Heathrow. One thing that will damage air quality around the airport is the fact that the Windsor-Slough link will remain a diesel one—it will not be electrified, as was originally promised. People like me supported the original proposal for the third runway at Heathrow because we were promised that electrification.

Charlotte Leslie: I start my speech by saying that what happens in one area of the country affects another and then I go on to make an unapologetically biased—not biased, but strong—case for the south-west, but I hear exactly what the right hon. Lady says. Something happening in one region deeply affects another, but I continue to make a special case for the south-west, which has not, historically, had its merits duly considered by the Department.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that one example of how the south-west does not benefit from investment is that at the moment it is impossible to get a train from Plymouth or Exeter to Bristol along the very great western network on which we rely?

Charlotte Leslie: I think that anyone who has travelled that route will echo, with gusto, what my hon. Friend has just said.

Moving on to macro-level concerns, I find the National Audit Office report into the functioning of Network Rail, and into the Department's ability to project manage and to hold Network Rail to account, deeply concerning. I do not doubt the good intentions of all those involved, but we read in that report about over-optimism from Network Rail on significant elements of the electrification project and about inadequate project management. And the list goes on. The trouble is that it has become almost a matter of course over the years—I have to say, spanning various Governments—to expect any rail project to go way over budget and way over time, under Network Rail. If Britain is to stand a chance of competing globally, that simply is not good enough. I have to add that, from what I have seen, I do not think that Network Rail is a particularly good advert for those who still argue that the state should be running more of our

railways. Given Network Rail's performance, that idea fills me with absolute dread. I am not ideological on that point; I just like to see things work well.

It would be helpful if the Minister could outline what he sees as the main challenges for not just his Government but any Government delivering fit-for-purpose infrastructure projects under our current systems. I am particularly interested in knowing what levers he, as a Minister and an elected representative, has for holding Network Rail, which is, as I understand it, a state function, to account.

I have to confess to being a little confused on a matter of principle regarding the deferral of electrification. I know that the Government are saying that customers need not worry because we will get bigger and faster bi-mode trains delivering all the benefits of electrification without the need for that expensive "wire in the sky", but if everything is so awesome without electrification, why are we still talking about it at all? If it is all so awesome, why would such improvements from bi-mode rolling stock, for a fraction of the cost, not make electrification a redundant technology? And if it is not redundant, will it not cost more in the long term to do it later rather than sooner? We need more clarity about the Government's view of the merits of electrification.

I come now to more specific concerns. Have there been wasted works? It seems that significant investment has already been made in preparatory work for electrification that has now been deferred. Can the Minister give a figure for how much that has cost and can he provide a cast-iron guarantee that it is not now money wasted? I understand that Network Rail has suggested that the work to Bristol Temple Meads may now be completed by control period 6. Can the Minister clarify when during CP6 that might be?

Now that there has been a deferral of what was much vaunted electrification, questions are inevitably being asked about the other elements of the modernisation programme. The deferral announcement has dented confidence, and we really need that confidence to be rebuilt. Can the Minister assure us that the other core elements will be completed, such as the Filton bank capacity enhancement project, the new Hitachi hybrid intercity express trains and the two new services per hour between Bristol Temple Meads and London Paddington that those trains will enable?

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. As a Welsh MP—the only one here, I think—I add my weight to the argument that the south-west is under-represented where infrastructure is concerned and that there is a lack of confidence. Wales is also under-represented. Will the Minister, in his concluding remarks, outline the timetable for the main line electrification and reassure us that that will not slip? Confidence has been knocked.

Charlotte Leslie: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that extremely good point.

I know that many other Members would like the chance to speak. My final concern, which has been raised locally, is about rolling stock. The effect of the deferral of the electrification of the Thames valley branches on the planned cascade of the Thames turbo class 165 and 166 rolling stock to the west of England is vital to the MetroWest phases 1 and 2 projects. I have been very public about what seems to me, and to many

others in the region, an appalling missed opportunity on the part of local decision makers—their failure to prioritise the Henbury loop line in the MetroWest scheme. I have been clear that I do not think that such schemes are ambitious enough to meet the exponentially growing branch line demand in our region; however, they are a start. If the MetroWest scheme, as it is, were to suffer even further detriment, that would be catastrophic for our city and our region. I cannot impress that upon the Minister enough. Can he give assurances today that the rolling stock cascade—the Thames turbo class 165 and 166—will not be affected by the deferral?

I turn briefly to the Bristol East junction and to Temple Meads, issues that the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) will probably want to raise in more detail than I will. I have been pleased to be able to work, in many ways cross-party, on rail for our city. Can we get assurances regarding the concerns about the future of the remodelling of that junction and about plans for transforming Bristol Temple Meads to accommodate new trains at platforms zero and one? I know that the hon. Lady will want to speak about that, but I would like some replies from the Minister.

This is an important debate for so many MPs and so many of their constituents. It is not, as I fear it might be seen by some, people fussing over whether we have wire in the sky. It is about the south-west being sick of being the poor relation in our nation's transport projects while other high-speed projects go roaring on. It is about a real concern that this is somehow the thin end of a wedge that will see all the progress we have made over the past six years, of which I have been so proud, melt away. It is about all of us here, regardless of party, asking serious questions about whether the mechanisms and bodies that this or any Government have at their disposal to plan and build rail infrastructure are any longer fit for purpose. Given what we have seen of projects soaring over budget and over time and then getting paused, deferred, cancelled or any other word anyone would like to use, under an array of Governments, it is hard to believe that Network Rail is fit for purpose. If it is not, and assuming Britain wants to be a global competitor, can the Minister provide some thoughts on what on earth we are going to do about it?

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. The debate is due to finish at 5.45 pm. It is an hour-long debate. It is very difficult to chair because I have an array of parliamentary talent before me and just over 20 minutes of Back-Bench time before I have to call the Front-Bench spokespeople. Unfortunately, I am going to have to impose a time limit of three minutes. If Members intervene on each other, some of you will not get called, but if you stick to three minutes, everyone will get in, and there may be time at the end to intervene on the Front-Bench spokespeople.

5 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing the debate. I will curtail my comments.

I speak for my Bristol South constituents, who also use Bedminster and Parson Street stations, when I say that the so-called deferral of this project has confused

and outraged passengers in my constituency. We are confused because, despite the promises that we received and the significant disruption that we have tolerated, we have a half-finished project. We are outraged because the rail connections are such an important part of our economic development and our success. Bristol is key to the entire regional economy and that is why this is such a critical decision.

In 1835, an Act of Parliament created the Great Western Railway. In just six years, Brunel managed to build the entire thing from Paddington to Bristol—but in the last six years we have seen a complete lack of progress. Decisions have been delayed and deferred and now progress has been halted. At the Public Accounts Committee next month, we will consider the National Audit Office report and I would be grateful for comments from all Members. I suspect the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) will also join that discussion. The report is very clear. Who is accountable now for the decision? Who is in charge of the plan to deliver benefits to passengers? Who lined up the key components of the new trains with the infrastructure and the operator? Who is managing the critical path alongside things such as the signalling works?

I have three asks of the Minister. If he does not have time to answer my questions, I would appreciate an answer in writing. First, is there still a case for electrification? What is now the Department's analysis of the benefits for passengers in terms of journey times, frequency and capacity—dare I mention having a seat?—of bimodal trains versus electrification? We do not seem to know.

Secondly, Mr Brunel built the entire railway via an Act of Parliament, so why did the Department for Transport not at any point place an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 for all the works? It might have taken longer to get to this point, but Network Rail would not have had to go through the myriad processes that it has had to, across the whole line.

Thirdly, what is the role of the regulator, the Office of Rail and Road? The Government have chosen to make it an arms-length body, but what is its responsibility in all of this? There is a political choice between enhancements and renewals or maintenance. The regulator has a clear role on renewal and maintenance, in light of its safety responsibility, but enhancement such as electrification is different. I am interested to know what the Minister thinks about that.

The core of the matter is passengers and our constituents. Whatever processes were undertaken to deliver the decision, it is true to say that as a result Bristol people feel we are being short-changed, and as we are the gateway to the region, the entire south-west region is being short-changed. Who is making these decisions on behalf of Bristol colleagues? Consider the make-up of the Government, the Cabinet and the Tory Front Bench. Apart from the Secretary of State for International Trade, the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), the south-west has no representation at the top table of Government. There are 51 Tory MPs in the south-west, out of 55. I congratulate them on their victory, but they have a small smattering of Ministers from their number to be able to deliver top decisions at the top table—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. I call James Heappey.

5.3 pm

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing this debate, and for representing my parents-in-law so well.

It was a real blow to hear that the electrification of the great western main line would be deferred beyond Bath Spa, not least because as Members for the south-west region, we had all rather hoped that over the course of this Parliament we would be making the case for electrification to go on beyond Bristol to Weston-super-Mare, to Taunton and then on down into the far south-west. The fact that we are now here asking for it to be electrified to Bristol as originally planned is somewhat disappointing.

I have just one station in my constituency, Highbridge and Burnham, which is some way south of Bristol, although many people commute from there to Bristol and on to London. Many more of my constituents access the rail network in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) at Worle, or that of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) at Yatton. So my constituents have a real interest in seeing the electrification to Bristol completed and journey times improved, as well as commuter capacity.

In the brief time I have today, I have a couple of asks. First, bimodal trains are hugely impressive in the technology that they employ, but there is a sense that they have one foot in the past with diesel and one foot in the present with electrification. Given that so many of the bimodal trains operating out of Paddington towards Bristol Temple Meads will continue their journey on from Temple Meads to Weston, Taunton or Exeter, is there not a case for unmuzzling those trains—as the trains that operate on the Reading/Castle Cary/Taunton line have been unmuzzled—so that they have a bit of extra oomph to accelerate while under diesel power?

Secondly, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West raised the arrival of the additional rolling stock from the Thames valley, given the deferral of the electrification there. That is a real issue. I know from conversations earlier today with the Minister that it might be that the arrival of that rolling stock is not to do with the deferral but with delays elsewhere. Either way, that rolling stock is absolutely key. The commuter belt around Bristol—I know the part to the south particularly well, but I am sure it is the same for parts to the north and east as well—is increasingly congested. Two or three-carriage trains trying to serve those routes are simply not enough. We urgently need that rolling stock to come down from the Thames valley to serve the growing rail demand in the west country.

The Minister kindly came to the launch of the Peninsula Rail Task Force report. I ask him to ensure that all the things in that report about resilience in the far south-west do not find themselves competing with the very urgent things that need to be done to improve connectivity to Bristol.

5.7 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) for securing this debate. My constituents in

Bristol West are as perplexed and as outraged as I am to learn that the much-needed and long-awaited electrification of the Great Western Railway is being postponed. The works were initiated by the last Labour government, who rightly recognised that investing in infrastructure to support economic growth is a vital duty of government and that electrification helps to decrease air pollution, of which diesel engines are such a great cause.

Since then, the coalition and subsequent Tory Governments have paused, unpaused, and now paused the works again. As recently as June 2015, the then Secretary of State told the House:

“Electrification of the Great Western line is a top priority and I want Network Rail to concentrate its efforts on getting that right.”—[*Official Report*, 25 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 1068.]

Karin Smyth: Would my hon. Friend also agree that there is deep concern in Bristol that money has been diverted from the west country to fund the so-called northern powerhouse—from the great western line to perhaps HS2 or other projects?

Thangam Debbonaire: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The HS2 project is of course hugely, vastly more expensive than this project. It is extraordinary that the electrification is being sacrificed for other projects.

Similar uncertainty has been meted out to other regions, such as the electric spine and midland main line. In fact, in June, when the Secretary of State was confirming his support for the great western line electrification, he was at the same time pausing midland electrification and that on the trans-Pennine route. That does not appear to me to signify a coherent, thought-through plan to invest in infrastructure.

I would like the Minister to respond to the following questions. Where is the Government’s commitment to a western powerhouse? Will the west of England devolution deal end up having to cover the cost of the electrification project? What answers do the Government have for passengers who are currently stuck with journey times that feel to them routinely longer than those in the 1970s, when it was apparently possible to travel from Bristol Temple Meads to London in 90 minutes without stopping? Where is the sense in suspending the work when so much of it has already taken place? How does the Minister answer the Bristolians who have been given the idea that we are not worth bothering about? How does the Minister square the postponement with improving air quality, something which my constituents in Bristol West so badly want to see? Finally, when will the Government sort out a coherent, reliable plan for investment in infrastructure, and will that plan include proper levels of investment in local train services inside Bristol as well as to Bristol?

5.9 pm

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. My contribution will be brief. First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie). It is right that we collectively challenge and scrutinise the work of Network Rail. This project comes on the back of record investment not seen since Victorian times, and it is in stark contrast to the just six miles of electrification that was delivered under the previous Labour Government. I say that not to make a political

point, but to highlight what a large engineering challenge this is. I know that first-hand, because I had the pleasure of visiting the electrification training centre—a £10 million facility based in Swindon—where all the apprentices and staff working on the project will go to do their training.

It is frustrating, and we would all love to see this happen tomorrow, but there have been some successes already. The test track finished on time on 30 September, the Severn tunnel finished on time on 22 October, and all of last year's Christmas and Easter work was finished on time. The budget for the Christmas work is increasing from £60 million last year to £84 million.

I have some asks for the Minister, building on the positive news about the Hitachi trains, which will see a 40% increase in capacity. The Network Rail teams must engage with MPs and physically show us the engineering works, the challenges and the opportunities for the future. I know the Minister is held in very high regard, but I echo the plea for more south-west MPs to be on the Front Bench. I think we are all currently auditioning for that—we would all vote for ourselves if Front Benchers were democratically chosen. I hope the Minister will join me in lobbying the Government for the much-needed £5.5 million redevelopment of Swindon station, which is vital because there has been a 50% increase in train usage in the past decade, and it is anticipated that the extra capacity that the electrification work will create will make Swindon an even more popular destination—hard to believe, given that it already is the centre of all great things. Disability access must be a given for all future works at stations—I know the Minister will do that. Finally, as we look at the long-term arrangements for the operator of these lines, a long-term franchise must be put in place so investment in the day-to-day services matches the Government's commitment to improve our rail infrastructure.

5.12 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as ever, to see you in the Chair, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing this debate.

Last week, the National Audit Office issued a damning verdict on the way that this project has been handled to date. It described the project as

“a case study in how not to manage a major programme.”

The Secretary of State agreed when I put that to him at Transport questions. He said:

“I am not happy about the way in which the...programme has been managed”

and that he is

“still not satisfied with the progress that is being made.”—[*Official Report*, 17 November 2016; Vol. 617, c. 368.]

We need to look at what this tells us about how we handle major infrastructure projects—particularly transport infrastructure projects—in this country. They always seem to go over time and over budget, and they never seem to reach completion in the way that was originally intended. The epic mismanagement of this programme will cost the taxpayer £330 million, which is more than Bristol City Council's annual day-to-day budget.

Bristol Parkway now has to wait 18 months longer than planned for electrification—until the end of 2018—and Bristol Temple Meads, the station that most of my constituents use, now has to wait until at least 2024 for

an electrified connection to the Great Western Railway. There is no certainty it will happen, and many of my constituents have said that they have had to endure traffic jams caused by road closures for the essential work being carried out on bridges to prepare for electrification. Other roadworks are being carried out in Bristol, such as the MetroBus construction. It is already the most congested city in the country. My constituents have to endure more and they now feel it has been for nothing.

The Great Western Railway is already one of the most overcrowded routes in the country, and almost 8 million extra passengers a year are expected by 2018-19. Most of us who have travelled on that line will think, “Where on earth are you going to put them?” because it is already difficult to get a seat—certainly at peak times. The Secretary of State assured me that new stock will be rolled out sooner rather than later, but we are waiting for that promise to be fulfilled.

As well as calling on the Government to do what they can to speed up electrification, I want to flag up next year's feasibility study of suburban rail in the west. Local rail is an important part of what needs to be an increasingly integrated transport network. The hon. Member for Bristol North West talked about Bristol East junction. It used to be in my constituency, but I was cruelly deprived of it by the 2010 boundary changes, along with Temple Meads station, Lawrence Hill station and Stapleton Road station. I now have no stations. We are, however, campaigning for the re-opening of St Anne's Park station, which was closed in 1970. That would massively improve connections to jobs, services and culture for my constituents living in the more peripheral parts of east Bristol. I hope the Minister takes that on board, too.

5.15 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and to be back in this Chamber for the second time today talking about the desperately vital need for infrastructure investment in the south-west. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing this debate.

It is not all bad news coming down the track for Great Western. We will soon have the first new set of Intercity Express trains ordered in my lifetime. I think the last set was ordered back in 1976. I suspect it is tempting for the Minister and the Department for Transport, given all the issues they have had with this renewal, not to order the next set until 2056, but hopefully they will soon be on the line.

It is right that this debate has focused on the electrification programme. I represent a constituency in the far south-west that was not initially part of the electrification process, and the coastal track at Dawlish is very unlikely to be part of it in the near future, given the obvious issues of mixing high levels of voltage and sea water. My concern is about the impact of the project and, in particular, how its cost has risen dramatically.

As the Minister knows, we talked earlier about the Peninsula Rail Task Force and a £280 million project to secure the Dawlish line. That is about 10% of the cost of the electrification project, and only a fraction of the increase in cost in the past couple of years. My concern

[Kevin Foster]

is about the choices that the Government have when they make initial decisions and about the solidity of the information. As the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) said, we will certainly explore that at the Public Accounts Committee. My fear is always that projects look very attractive, and the price can look just about affordable, but they can require a much larger commitment that has not been predicted. In this case, we quickly found that the engineering required to put the masts in made it almost inevitable that the costs would rise significantly.

Given what the NAO report said, it is clear that in the future we need to plan how we deliver a whole railway, not just individual aspects. Passengers do not get on a train that has been heavily delayed due to flooding and say, "Great, I've got better wi-fi"; they look at their whole experience on the journey. That is why it is right that we ensure our investment projects are better managed. We must deliver projects without such issues and we must make our railway more resilient. As I said in an intervention, there is no train service between parts of Devon and Cornwall and Bristol, and there is a limited service between Devon and Cornwall and London. The well-known issues with the network are screaming out for investment.

5.18 pm

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing this debate on a subject about which many of us have spoken together over the past few years.

The electrification of the main line is still projected to cut the journey time between my constituency and London, but, given the pinch point at Bristol East, there is a question about whether it will actually speed up the journey time between Bath and Bristol. That has obviously caused concern among my constituents and, I think, pretty much all of our constituents across the whole of the west of England.

I was very disappointed by the Minister's announcement that the electrification of the line is going to be put on hold until control period 6—2019 to 2024. Following Network Rail's frustrating report, I welcome the fact that the journey will still be introduced, and that the new Hitachi Intercity trains and the new commuter trains will be on the line by 2018. However, our constituents are justifiably concerned, given that they have to sit on the floor and the trains break down regularly between Bath and Bristol Temple Meads and onwards to other parts of the suburban rail network.

The electrification of the great western main line will now stop at Thingley Junction, which, contrary to rumour, is just before Bath Spa. We have had to endure a long period with the Box Tunnel being reduced in height, and we would like to have confirmed that the reduction in height will still enable the new trains to get through to Bath, Bristol and beyond.

The increase in capacity will clearly make a big difference and contribute a large economic benefit to our communities. However, there is genuine concern that how much the economy of the west of England contributes to the national economy is often underestimated:

we have the second largest number of tech and creative companies anywhere outside Hoxton in London; we have one of the fastest growing economies anywhere in the country; and yet, off the top of my head, we receive the second lowest amount per capita of transport infrastructure spend in the country. That desperately needs to be re-evaluated.

Electrification would have a positive impact on the tourist economy, which is hugely important to my world heritage site city. Bath is a beautiful city and I want to see more tourists come to it, which would have a big knock-on effect for Somerset and Bristol, and that is another huge draw. With those trains, more people will have the confidence that they will arrive in Bath and the west of England on time.

Lastly, I want to echo some of the comments made about Network Rail. For time immemorial, we MPs have had our concerns about Network Rail being able to deliver the infrastructure projects that we require of it. I do not think that anything should be off the table, in particular given the contents of the NAO report.

5.21 pm

Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing the debate. She made many of the points that I wished to make, but much more eloquently than I might ever have done. I join her in expressing disappointment at the decision to defer the four electrification projects along the great western route.

I will reiterate a couple of the points made by my hon. Friend, because that decision will have a direct impact on a number of my constituents in south Gloucestershire who travel from Yate, specifically, to Bristol Parkway and on to London. More passengers will continue to use the Bristol Parkway service as a result of the worsening congestion for many residents of south Gloucestershire.

I will also express some concerns about the knock-on effects of the plans to delay investment. I first seek reassurances from the Minister, as others have done, that the deferral of electrification of the Thames valley lines will not affect the cascading out of the Thames Turbo trains, the 165 and 166, to the west of England. They are essential to replace the trains that Great Western Railway has to return at the end of their leases. Failure to do so will result in a reduction of services and an increase in passenger overcrowding.

The chairman of our local West of England LEP called those trains

"essential to deliver the £100m MetroWest Phase 1 and 2 rail schemes".

Phase 2 of the MetroWest scheme includes the plan to increase the frequency of services between Bristol and Yate from hourly to half-hourly, which will be hugely important to people in Yate, Coalpit Heath and surrounding areas. It has overwhelming support from people who want to see a reduction in overcrowding on the service, and would without doubt take more cars off already congested roads around Yate and Coalpit Heath. I will be grateful if the Minister clarifies that in his closing remarks.

I will also be grateful if the Minister clarifies the impact of the decision to delay on the local four-tracking project at Filton, which, too, is essential to deliver MetroWest phase 2. South Gloucestershire Council has already started some of the clearing work, so an early indication of any effect from the Minister will be extremely welcome.

Lastly, I call for reassurance that there are no plans to change the proposed four inter-city express services an hour between Bristol Temple Meads and London, two of which will pass through Bristol Parkway and connect directly with Yate services.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West for securing the debate, and I will welcome the Minister's reassurances.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): We now come to the Front Benchers' speeches. I want to call Charlotte Leslie again to sum up the debate no later than 5.43 pm, which means that the Front-Bench speakers have nine minutes each. Were the Opposition spokesman to take less than nine minutes, there will be more time for the Minister to speak and, potentially, for interventions, but we are in her hands. I call Pat Glass.

5.24 pm

Pat Glass (North West Durham) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Hollobone. I will endeavour to be as quick as I can.

The recent decision by the Department for Transport to delay the electrification of the great western route is just the latest in a series of announcements of delays and pauses made by the Government on electrification of our railways. We have had one announcement after another by the Government, who still state that they are planning electrification, but while the Government have promised much, they have delivered little.

I sympathise with the Minister. Like me, he is new to the role and just happens to be holding the parcel when the music stops. However, I have a criticism about his recent announcement, because he appeared to sneak it out just hours before the November recess and on the day of the American election when, presumably, he was hoping we would all be looking the other way.

I therefore congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing this important debate. She and I served together on the Select Committee on Education when we were new Members in this House, and I understand her dedication to the city of Bristol. I also want to acknowledge all the MPs from Bristol: they are four strong women, who are here together fighting for a better future for rail in their city.

The case for the electrification of the route was set out in October 2009. The Department for Transport projected then that it would take eight years to complete and cost up to £1 billion. According to the original timetable, we should have been looking at a fully electrified line from London to Swansea by the end of next year. Since then, however, the project has had a very unhappy journey.

Two weeks ago today, we were told by the Rail Minister that the project will be paused, with no detail of when it might be unpaused or restarted, or, indeed, if it will ever be completed at all. Over the past six and a half years we have had delay after delay to the original timetable, and the cost to the taxpayer has skyrocketed

as a result. As the Minister knows, the National Audit Office, in its recently published report, laid the blame squarely on the Department for Transport, stating that it did not

“plan and manage all projects...in a sufficiently joined up way.”

I have worked in government at local and national levels. At the national level, I found that the lack of planning and joined-upness makes local government look like a smoothly operating machine, and that is saying something. Even within that, the Department for Transport has its very own place.

The cost of the project was reassessed in September 2014, when the Department estimated it at £1.5 billion, up 50% on the original costings. Although the cost-benefit ratio expected by the Department for Transport in March 2015 was within the Department's high value-for-money range, at 2.4:1, by the end of last year that had dropped to 1.6:1, which meant that it had fallen to within the medium value-for-money range. That is because the Department was forced to announce that the cost of the project had been revised yet again and was now estimated to be more than twice the original projection, at £2.1 billion. The latest announcement is in another league altogether, however, with the estimated costs to the taxpayer reaching £5.58 billion. The Government have managed this infrastructure project so badly that the cost-benefit ratio has now fallen through the floor.

The issue is not isolated to the great western route alone. Rather, the Government's handling of the electrification of UK railways is being felt right across the country. First, we had the delays to the electrification of the trans-Pennine railway. Originally planned to be completed by the end of 2018, that is now looking distinctly unlikely—to put it politely. The electrification of the midland main line was paused in June last year. The wires will now not reach Kettering and Corby until 2019—that is today's estimate—whereas the original plan had been for electrification to stretch far beyond Corby to Derby, Leicester and Nottingham by 2018. When the Government finally announced that both plans had been revived, it was only to say they would be four years behind schedule.

In 2013, 30% of the most crowded train services in England and Wales were Great Western services into Paddington, and the Department for Transport forecast tells us that passenger demand on that route is to grow by 81% between 2013 and 2019. Electrification is therefore essential if we are to see any improvement for passengers. It will lead to further economic benefits, in particular driven by freight trains running on electrified lines, and it is vital if we are to reduce our carbon footprint and will help to build a greener transport network, with the increase of freight on rail being central to that aim. It is therefore really disappointing to see that a significant part of the estimated £330 million that will be added to the bill for the electrification of the great western route will come about because of the revisions that are needed to the new all-electric trains that the Government ordered.

Thanks to the delays, those trains, which were set to cost the taxpayer £4.1 billion, will now need to be fitted with diesel engines so they can run on sections of the great western route that the Government have now decided will not be electrified. Adding those diesel engines will make the trains heavier, less energy efficient, more polluting and more damaging to the track. So this Government will spend £5.58 billion on upgrades to the

[Pat Glass]

great western route that will in fact cause a reduction in capacity, a slower service and an increase in carbon emissions and mean that rail lines will require even more regular maintenance work. That is quite an achievement.

The right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) said that this issue impacts on the earlier debate about pollution in the Thames valley and the decision about a third Heathrow runway. Further, passengers in the north of England and Scotland will have to wait up to two years longer for improvements to their services, because the revised plans and delays to infrastructure works mean that old Great Western Railway stock will not be passed on to other areas that were depending upon getting that old stock to make such improvements.

The budgeting for this project has been shambolic, and clearly no one can confidently rely on any figures produced by the Department for Transport. The Government cannot be allowed to get away with continually claiming to be investing in infrastructure when we see Ministers once again with their tails between their legs trying to sneak out announcements about further delays to their plans.

Will the Minister tell us exactly when the Government intend to follow through on the great western line? When can we expect the pause to cease and the project to restart, if it restarts? In what shape will it be if it ever restarts? At the beginning of the debate, the hon. Member for Bristol North West talked about passengers. She is absolutely right: neither passengers nor taxpayers are getting a good deal, and quite frankly, they deserve better.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. Will the Minister bring his remarks to a conclusion no later than 5.43 pm to allow the mover of the motion to sum up the debate?

5.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie) on securing this debate. Contrary to what we have just heard, I actually welcome the debate and the opportunity to discuss a complex project. Whether I can do it justice in nine minutes is another matter, but I will do my best. If I fail to address anyone's points, I shall be more than happy to write to colleagues, and I thank all those who have participated in the debate.

My hon. Friend started by suggesting that the south-west was perhaps not first in the queue. My diary shows that I started today at the publication of the report of the all-party Peninsula Rail Task Force. Immediately afterwards, I had a meeting about the Exeter to Barnstaple railway line, and I have spent the rest of the day addressing this issue, which is a priority for the Government—and not just today. This is the first major rail electrification project for many, many years, and there has been an awful lot to learn. I am not someone who tries to go for cheap partisan points, but there is one that cannot be avoided in this discussion: the Labour party electrified fewer than 20 miles of track in its 13 years in office. We are having to overcome a backlog of delayed investment.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): As we have heard, the NAO report on the electrification of the Great Western Railway states that £330 million has been wasted so far. Does the Minister believe that that huge waste of money endangers the final delivery of the Cardiff to Swansea section of the project?

Paul Maynard: We certainly recognise a lot of what the National Audit Office report says, and I will set out what the Department is doing in response to that. As the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) pointed out, the Secretary of State was critical of progress on the project so far at Transport questions last week. I share those concerns; the project clearly has not gone well.

However, it is worth stressing that we are having to defer four elements. I have heard many words pass around the Chamber—"cancellation", "pause" and all sorts of others—but "deferral" is quite a precise term. No work is being paused; if one considers the various elements that make up the scheme around Bristol, work is continually ongoing. We are raising bridges, improving line speeds and resignalling. That is all preparatory work before decisions can be taken on proceeding with further electrification. The only work that has been suspended in the greater Bristol area is the erection of the overhead line equipment. That is what has been deferred until a future control period. I cannot make precise statements about what control period 6 will contain, because that has to be part of a wider national package, but I want to make it clear that we are not stopping work on the electrification programme in the Bristol area. That work continues.

Karin Smyth: If that is the case, why do the Government continue to spend money doing something that they cannot at any point say when we will need? Is that not potentially wasting more taxpayers' money? What is the purpose of electrification if it does not deliver benefits and we are going to spend more money at some unknown time in the future?

Paul Maynard: I have just said that we will be making announcements about what—[*Interruption.*] Is the hon. Lady going to listen to my reply or just mutter at me? I am happy to respond to her point if she wants to listen. We will take decisions about what control period 6 comprises and announce the whole of that control period at the appropriate time. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, she will be more than aware that Sir Peter Hendy has already reprogrammed other projects across the country. As Rail Minister, I am not prepared to part-announce elements of control period 6 depending on what debate I happen to be in at any moment in time. That would not be a prudent way to go forward—nor, were I in her position on that Committee, would I think it a particularly prudent position for any Minister facing her queries to take.

John Penrose: Will the Minister give way?

Paul Maynard: I will happily give way, and then I will need to make a little progress.

John Penrose: Can the Minister reassure us that as a result of the deferral that he has just described, the cost-benefit ratio of the elements of the programme that have been paused will not be substantially changed?

Can he also provide us with information about how those cost-benefit ratios compare with both the decision not to go ahead at all with the electrification of the suburban Bristol railway lines and things that are going ahead, such as High Speed 2?

Paul Maynard: There will always be ongoing recalculations of the cost-benefit ratios of any wider projects, as well as the elements within them. I do not see this as a matter of HS2 or the great western main line. There are investment backlogs that we have to catch up on in all parts of the country, and each investment has to respond to a specific rail need in that region. Here, we are trying to respond to a specific rail need by ensuring that all the passenger benefits that can be accrued by electrification can be delivered as soon as possible for the use of the new bi-mode intercity express programme trains.

John Penrose *rose*—

Paul Maynard: If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene, it will have to be the final occasion.

John Penrose: That is very reassuring. I would be very happy if the Minister would provide the specific numbers that I asked for, perhaps in a letter.

Paul Maynard: I will happily write to the hon. Gentleman with that information at a later point. That is more than fine.

Hon. Members have noted the extra seats and the 15-minute journey time saving from London Paddington to Bristol Temple Meads via Bristol Parkway that the new trains will provide, and I hope that they will also note that those trains should stimulate economic growth across the region as a whole. Bristol is one of the few cities that is a net contributor to the UK Treasury, and that has to be recognised. We need to do more to work with Bristol to ensure that all those in the commuter belt around Bristol are properly able to access the city. That entirely makes sense. But we need to go back to the fundamental point that modernising this line has been an ambitious and challenging undertaking, and it has not been straightforward. Even closing the Severn tunnel for six weeks this autumn has caused immense disruption to journeys and people's lives, but it has been worth while, because had we not closed it for those six weeks, there would have been five years of weekend work and disruption.

As a result of that challenge and the complexity of the work, with ageing assets, heritage sites and a very busy line that Network Rail has to work around, difficulties have occurred. As was mentioned, the National Audit Office report was highly critical of what had occurred. However, what is often not pointed out in these debates is the recognition the NAO has given to the changes that the Department has made since 2015. In particular, we now have a programme board for each route upgrade across the country, chaired by a senior responsible owner from the DFT, to provide effective oversight of delivery.

We are working closely with Network Rail, train operators and other partners to ensure that major construction works and the introduction of new train services occur in a pragmatic, sequenced and timely manner and that all elements of those complex processes interact sensibly with each other. There is no point in

delivering a piece of rolling stock that cannot operate on a particular track because the infrastructure work has not been done. That requires work to be sequenced. Much of the criticism in the NAO's report was of the failure to sequence early on in the process and understand the true scope of the project.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West was concerned that the decision represents a waste of money. I would say that it does not at all. The preparatory work will enable future decisions to be taken, which is also a point that she made. If one takes some of the work around Bristol East junction, for example, the savings made through the deferrals are specifically targeted at bringing forward the work to enable the capacity improvements that will allow full advantage to be taken of the new bi-modes. If that did not occur, there would be less benefit from having the bi-modes because there would not be the capacity at Bristol East junction. That underlines the point about sequencing work and, in a project of this complexity, the overall need to have a degree of flexibility in the system so that, as technology moves on, options change and new pieces of locomotive and rolling stock come on stream, we have the capacity in our projects to make those pragmatic decisions and seek to deliver the benefits to passengers as soon as is possible.

As I mentioned earlier, this decision underscores a wider approach to rail investment across the country as a whole. Passenger outcomes must be delivered while achieving the best value for every pound spent. On that point, the Government have been clear about the rationale for electrification. We are not against using electrification as part of a wider strategy for delivering improved services. Electrification does bring benefits. It enables, for instance, the use of electric trains, which over time reduce the cost of running the railway as well as bringing environmental benefits—but we have to make improvements in the way that makes most sense and gives most value to the taxpayer. Therefore, in some cases, where a train can run on both electric and diesel power, it is right to look at how that can be factored into any decision about how we sequence the different elements of any electrification process.

In the end, electrification is not an objective. It is a means to an end. It is an input. It is about putting wires up. It is about traction and power. It is an engineering solution to a defined problem. Yes, it is an enabler of new trains, but that new capacity is needed by passengers as soon as possible. Therefore, if we have access to these new trains, I think it right that we go down that path.

Nick Smith: May I press the Minister on when he thinks the Cardiff-to-Swansea section of the project will be completed? What is his latest estimate?

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. Before the Minister replies, may I say that he must allow time for Charlotte Leslie to sum up?

Paul Maynard: I do beg your pardon, Mr Hollobone. I was looking at the clock showing the time left for my speech. If I may, to save time, I will write to the hon. Gentleman. I will end it there and write to any further Members who asked questions to leave time for my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West to finish the debate. I thank hon. Members for listening.

5.43 pm

Charlotte Leslie: Before I pay tribute to the Minister for answering and to Members who have come here, it is appropriate to pay tribute to Network Rail workers. While Network Rail has taken a bit of a battering for its organisational abilities at the top level, we should pay tribute to those who over the past couple of days have been working so hard to keep our railways running, as well as those at Great Western Railway on the ground who are making passengers' lives bearable on a day-to-day basis.

We have had a wide-ranging debate. I am proud to be part of a group of powerful women speaking for Bristol, who have dominated the debate in many ways with Bristol's interests and articulated powerfully Bristol residents' concerns about the announcement. The case has been made that the whole region is affected by Members from as far afield as Torbay, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) made the case about his city well.

There is anger generally that Network Rail does not seem to be able to deliver the projects that any Government—whether Labour or Conservative—want it to deliver. I take the Minister's point that not an awful lot of rail was electrified under the previous Labour Government. Perhaps they were wise in leaving it as a promise for the next Government because they realised how difficult that might be to do with the mechanisms they had at their disposal. I pay tribute to our Government for even trying.

I take the point that the project is complex. However, if we are to be a global competitor, we need to sort it out. We can sit and talk about the reasons, the complexities and the sequencing, but other nations in Europe manage to get it done. If we are to compete properly, we need to up our game dramatically.

5.45 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Tuesday 22 November 2016

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Improving Planning Performance

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell):

An effective and strongly performing planning system is a crucial part of delivering on our commitment to increase housing supply. We are very clear that planning delays are bad for both applicants and local residents. They can slow down the building of new homes and also create uncertainty about the future shape of the community. Planning is a control on people making use of their land and is a quasi-judicial process, so any delay is denying them their legal rights.

We have a locally led planning system, which sets a clear statutory framework in which a local planning authority should make decisions. The existing designation regime had great success in delivering improved performance in local planning authorities. In the most recent quarter, 83% of applications for major development were decided on time, the highest figure on record. This is up from 57% in July to September 2012, when the designation regime was first announced. We are committed to ensuring this is reflected more widely across the planning decisions authorities make. Therefore we are extending the regime to further drive delivery against statutory requirements by including an authority's performance in determining applications for non-major development. This was set out in recently laid regulations¹, which came into force on 21 October 2016.

Today we have laid before Parliament "Improving Planning Performance: Criteria for Designation (Revised 2016)", which sets out revised criteria that the Secretary of State intends to use for designating a local planning authority as underperforming and the thresholds that authorities will be assessed against in the next designation round in the first quarter of 2017.

Speed of decision making for the purposes of the non-statutory identification scheme for on-shore oil and gas applications, as set out in the written ministerial statement of 16 September 2015, HCWS201, will be assessed by reference to the revised criteria, including the revised threshold for major development. The revised criteria will not apply to the final quarter of 2016 identification round: we will assess authorities on this basis from the first quarter of 2018 and annually thereafter.

Copies of "Improving Planning Performance: Criteria for Designation (Revised 2016)" have been placed in the Library of the House.

¹The Town and Country Planning (Section 62A Applications) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 No. 944 and The Town and Country Planning (Section 62A Applications) (Hearings) (Amendment) Rules 2016 No. 955.

[HCWS276]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Trade Foreign Affairs Council and Notification of UK Opt-in

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): My noble Friend the Minister of State, Lord Price has today made the following statement:

The EU Foreign Affairs Council (Trade) took place in Brussels on 11 November 2016. I represented the UK at the meeting. A summary of the discussions follows.

Modernisation of Trade Defence Instruments (MTDI)

Over breakfast, the presidency's latest compromise proposal was discussed, which included suggestions for how to limit use of the Lesser Duty Rule (LDR) in particular circumstances. Commissioner Malmström underlined that limitations to the LDR would be the exception and not the rule and committed to provide further evidence in support of the proposal.

Given that there were still outstanding issues to resolve, no vote took place at trade FAC. However, given the support from a significant number of member states, work will continue at working level and Coreper, where the presidency will aim to finalise a comprehensive mandate for trilogues before the December European Council.

WTO, Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA), Environmental Goods Agreement (EGA)

Malmström said the EU needed to work with others to shape the possible outcomes for the 11th WTO ministerial conference in Buenos Aires in December 2017.

Malmström reiterated that concluding TiSA was firmly in the EU's interests. On the EGA, she said that conclusion at the 3-4 December ministerial was a real possibility. The outstanding EGA issue of bicycles was again discussed.

EU-US (TTIP)

Commissioner Malmström recapped on recent progress on TTIP. Discussions supported the need for a realistic approach and I underlined our continued support and suggested that we wait to see how the political context evolved.

EU-Japan

Recent negotiations had gone well, but further progress was needed on non-tariff measures, services and procurement.

It is difficult to know how the stalling of TPP might affect EU-Japan.

EU-Mercosur

The October round with Mercosur, the first for four years, had gone well, with Mercosur showing more flexibility on goods and engaging on a wider range of issues.

Ukraine Autonomous Trade Measures (ATMs)

Commissioner Malmström sought to reassure member states that safeguards would limit any negative impact on the EU of the proposed further ATMs, which go beyond the provisions of the EU-Ukraine free trade agreement. It was important to bear in mind the broader political context for the proposal.

Ecuador accession to the EU-Andean FTA

At the signing ceremony of the protocol for Ecuador's accession to the Andean FTA, I signed on behalf of the UK.

The UK also opted in to the Council decisions on signing, provisional application and conclusion of the protocol of accession of Ecuador to the Andean FTA, insofar as they relate to the temporary presence of natural persons for business, otherwise known as Mode IV. The Government are committed to taking all opt-in decisions on a case-by-case basis, putting the national interest at the heart of the decision-making process.

[HCWS275]

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 22 November 2016

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