

Monday
5 December 2016

Volume 618
No. 75



HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Monday 5 December 2016

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(FORMED BY THE RT HON. THERESA MAY, MP, JULY 2016)

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt Hon. Theresa May, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Philip Hammond, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt Hon. Amber Rudd, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS—The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE—The Rt Hon. Sir Michael Fallon, MP
LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE—The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—The Rt Hon. Justine Greening, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION—The Rt Hon. David Davis, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Liam Fox, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY—The Rt Hon. Greg Clark, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS—The Rt Hon. Damian Green, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT—The Rt Hon. Chris Grayling, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT—The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid, MP
LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt Hon. David Lidington, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt Hon. David Mundell, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt Hon. Alun Cairns, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt Hon. James Brokenshire, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—The Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—The Rt Hon. Priti Patel, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT—The Rt Hon. Karen Bradley, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER—The Rt Hon. Sir Patrick McLoughlin
LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND LORD PRIVY SEAL—The Rt Hon. Baroness Evans of Bowes Park

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Greg Clark, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Joseph Johnson, MP (Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation) §
Nick Hurd (Minister for Climate Change and Industry)
Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE, CMG

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Margot James, MP
Jesse Norman, MP

Cabinet Office—

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL—The Rt Hon. David Lidington §

MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE AND PAYMASTER GENERAL—The Rt Hon. Ben Gummer, MP

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Chris Skidmore, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER—The Rt Hon. Sir Patrick McLoughlin, MP

Communities and Local Government—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Gavin Barwell, MP (Minister for Housing and Planning)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Marcus Jones, MP
Andrew Percy, MP
Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth §

Culture, Media and Sport—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Karen Bradley, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Matt Hancock, MP (Minister for Digital and Culture)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Tracey Crouch, MP
Rob Wilson, MP
Baroness Shields OBE §
Lord Ashton of Hyde §

Defence—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Sir Michael Fallon, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Mike Penning, MP (Minister for the Armed Forces)
The Rt Hon. Earl Howe §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Mark Lancaster, MP
Harriet Baldwin, MP

Education—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—The Rt Hon. Justine Greening, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Nick Gibb, MP (Minister for School Standards)
The Rt Hon. Robert Halfon, MP (Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills)
Joseph Johnson, MP (Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation) §
Edward Timpson, MP (Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Caroline Dinenage, MP
Lord Nash

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—George Eustice, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Thérèse Coffey, MP
Lord Gardiner of Kimble

Exiting the European Union —

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. David Davis, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—The Rt Hon. David Jones, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Robin Walker, MP
Lord Bridges of Headley MBE

Foreign and Commonwealth Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Sir Alan Duncan, MP (Minister for Europe and the Americas)
The Rt Hon. Baroness Anelay of St Johns DBE (Minister for the Commonwealth and the UN) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Tobias Ellwood, MP
Alok Sharma, MP

Health—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Philip Dunne, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Nicola Blackwood, MP
David Mowat, MP
Lord Prior of Brampton

Home Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Amber Rudd, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Brandon Lewis, MP (Minister for Policing and the Fire Service) §
Ben Wallace, MP (Minister for Security)
Robert Goodwill, MP (Minister for Immigration)
Baroness Williams of Trafford

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Sarah Newton, MP
Baroness Shields OBE §

International Development—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Priti Patel, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Rory Stewart, MP
The Rt Hon. Lord Bates (Minister for the Commonwealth and the UN) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—James Wharton, MP

International Trade—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Liam Fox, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Greg Hands, MP (Minister for Trade and Investment)
Lord Price CVO

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Mark Garnier, MP

Justice—

LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Sir Oliver Heald, QC, MP (Minister for Courts and Justice)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Sam Gyimah, MP
Phillip Lee, MP

ADVOCATE GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Lord Keen of Elie, QC

Law Officers—

ATTORNEY GENERAL—The Rt Hon. Jeremy Wright, QC, MP

SOLICITOR GENERAL—Robert Buckland, QC, MP

Leader of the House of Commons—

LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt Hon. David Lidington, MP §

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—Michael Ellis, MP §

Northern Ireland—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. James Brokenshire, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Kris Hopkins, MP
Lord Dunlop §**Scotland Office—**

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. David Mundell, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Lord Dunlop §

Transport—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Chris Grayling, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—The Rt Hon. John Hayes, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Andrew Jones, MP
Paul Maynard, MP
Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**Treasury—**

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt Hon. Theresa May, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Philip Hammond, MP

CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. David Gauke, MP

FINANCIAL SECRETARY—Jane Ellison, MP

ECONOMIC SECRETARY—Simon Kirby, MP

COMMERCIAL SECRETARY—

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Gavin Williamson, MP

LORDS COMMISSIONERS—

The Rt. Hon. David Evennett, MP
Guto Bebb, MP §
Stephen Barclay, MP
Guy Opperman, MP
Robert Syms, MP
Andrew Griffiths, MP

ASSISTANT WHIPS—

Michael Ellis, MP §
Chris Heaton-Harris, MP
Graham Stuart, MP
Heather Wheeler, MP
Mark Spencer, MP
Christopher Pincher, MP
Jackie Doyle-Price, MP
Steve Brine, MP

Wales Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Alun Cairns, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Guto Bebb, MP §

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth §

Work and Pensions

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Damian Green, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Damian Hinds, MP (Minister for Employment)

Penny Mordaunt, MP (Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work)

The Rt Hon. Lord Freud (Minister for Welfare Reform)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Richard Harrington, MP (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions)

Caroline Nokes, MP (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery)

Office of the Leader of the House of Lords—

LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND LORD PRIVY SEAL—The Rt Hon. Baroness Evans of Bowes Park

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt Hon. Earl Howe §

Her Majesty's Household—

LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt Hon. Earl Peel GCVO, DL

LORD STEWARD—The Earl of Dalhousie

MASTER OF THE HORSE—Lord Vestey KCVO

TREASURER—The Rt Hon. Anne Milton, MP

COMPTROLLER—Mel Stride, MP

VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Julian Smith, MP

CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—Lord Taylor of Holbeach CBE

CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD—Earl of Courtown

BARONESSES IN WAITING—Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen, Baroness Goldie DL, Baroness Mobarik CBE

LORDS IN WAITING—Lord Ashton of Hyde §, Viscount Younger of Leckie, The Rt Hon. Lord Young of Cookham CH

§ *Members of the Government listed under more than one Department*

 SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—The Rt Hon. Dame Caroline Spelman, MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

THE SPEAKER—The Rt Hon. John Bercow, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Lindsay Hoyle, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Mrs Eleanor Laing, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Natascha Engel, MP

PANEL OF CHAIRS

Sir David Amess, MP, Mr Adrian Bailey, MP, Mr Clive Betts, MP, Mr Peter Bone, MP, Mr Graham Brady, MP, Ms Karen Buck, MP, Mr Christopher Chope, MP, Mr David Crausby, MP, Geraint Davies, MP, Philip Davies, MP, Nadine Dorries, MP, Mr Nigel Evans, MP, Robert Ffello, MP, Sir Roger Gale, MP, Mike Gapes, MP, The Rt Hon. Cheryl Gillan, MP, James Gray, MP, The Rt Hon. David Hanson, MP, Mr Philip Hollobone, MP, The Rt Hon. George Howarth, MP, Sir Edward Leigh, MP, Mrs Anne Main, MP, Steve McCabe, MP, Sir Alan Meale, MP, Mrs Madeleine Moon, MP, Mr David Nuttall, MP, Ian Paisley, MP, Albert Owen, MP, Mark Pritchard, MP, Andrew Rosindell, MP, The Rt Hon. Joan Ryan, MP, Mr Gary Streeter, MP, Graham Stringer, MP, Mr Andrew Turner, MP, Mr Charles Walker, MP, Phil Wilson, MP

SECRETARY—Colin Lee

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The Rt Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), Sir Paul Beresford, MP, The Rt Hon. Tom Brake, MP, The Rt Hon. David Lidington, MP (Leader of the House), Stewart Hosie, MP, Valerie Vaz, MP, The Rt Hon. Dame Rosie Winterton, MP, David Natzler (Clerk of the House), Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Dame Janet Gaymer, DBE (External Member), Jane McCall (External Member)

SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION—Tom Goldsmith

ASSISTANT SECRETARY—Helen Wood

ADMINISTRATION ESTIMATE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Dame Janet Gaymer, DBE (Chair), Sir Paul Beresford, MP, Tom Brake, MP, The Rt Hon. Dame Rosie Winterton, MP, Jane McCall, Bob Scruton

SECRETARY OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE—Lloyd Owen

LIAISON COMMITTEE

The Rt Hon. Kevin Barron, MP, The Rt Hon. Hilary Benn, MP, Sir Paul Beresford, MP, Mr Clive Betts, MP, Crispin Blunt, MP, Andrew Bridgen, MP, Neil Carmichael, MP, Sir William Cash, MP, Damian Collins, MP, Mary Creagh, MP, The Rt Hon. Yvette Cooper, MP, David T. C. Davies, MP, Mrs Louise Ellman, MP, The Rt Hon. Frank Field, MP, The Rt Hon. Harriet Harman, MP, Meg Hillier, MP, Mr Bernard Jenkin, MP, Helen Jones, MP, The Rt Hon. Dr Julian Lewis, MP, Angus Brendan MacNeil, MP, Ian Mearns, MP, Stephen Metcalfe, MP, The Rt Hon. Mrs Maria Miller, MP, Robert Neill, MP, Neil Parish, MP, Mr Laurence Robertson, MP, Derek Twigg, MP, Stephen Twigg, MP, The Rt Hon. Mr Andrew Tyrie, MP (Chair), Mr Charles Walker, MP, Bill Wiggin, MP, Pete Wishart MP, Dr Sarah Wollaston, MP, Mr Iain Wright, MP

CLERK—Fergus Reid

THE BOARD

Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Carlos Bamford (Managing Director, In-House Services), Myfanwy Barrett (Managing Director, Corporate Services and Finance Director), John Benger (Clerk Assistant and Managing Director, Chamber and Committees), Lee Bridges (Head of Communications), Marianne Cwynarski (Head of the Governance Office), Brian Fennimore (Managing Director, Strategic Estates), Rob Greig (Director of the Parliamentary Digital Service), Eric Hepburn (Director of Security for Parliament), David Natzler (Clerk of the House and Head of the House of Commons Service) [ex officio], Annette Toft (Stepping Up Lead), Patsy Richards (Customer Service Lead), Edge Watchorn (People Stripe Director), Penny Young (Librarian and Managing Director, Research and Information, and Managing Director, Participation)

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD—Sarah Petit

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

David Natzler (Clerk of the House and Head of the House of Commons Service), Ian Ailles (Director General of the House of Commons), Myfanwy Barrett (Managing Director, Corporate Services and Finance Director)

SECRETARY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE—Sarah Petit

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—Peter Barratt

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—Saira Salimi

SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Kathryn Hudson

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 18 MAY 2015]

SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 618

EIGHTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2016-2017

House of Commons

Monday 5 December 2016

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Unskilled Migration: Employment Levels

1. **Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): What discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the effect of unskilled migration on levels of employment. [907614]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): The latest labour market statistics show that more British people are in work than ever before, the unemployment rate is at its lowest level for over a decade and nine in 10 people in jobs are UK nationals. However, the Prime Minister has been clear that as we conduct negotiations to leave the European Union, it must be a priority to regain more control of the numbers of people who come here from Europe.

Ian Austin: There is no point in national London politicians lecturing people in places such as the black country with national statistics, because this has different impacts in different communities. Why are low-skilled migrants still coming here when we have hundreds of thousands of unemployed people in Britain? Why have the Government not stopped companies from just advertising jobs abroad or using workers from overseas

to undercut wages here? And why do the Government not require large firms to train up local apprentices if they do have to hire someone from abroad?

Amber Rudd: It is a little rich getting that sort of lecture from a Labour Member, because the Labour party failed to put controls on in the 2004 enlargement and most of its Members who were in charge then have admitted what a mistake that was. There are no lectures coming from my party—only hard answers. The answer is that we will be restricting immigration when we move to leaving the EU.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): Does the Home Secretary agree that students should be removed from the “tens of thousands” target? Does she also agree that as the data are extremely poor, we should strain every sinew to try to get better quality data so that we can form a judgment about whether—and if so, how—we can ensure that exports, which is what foreign students are, are maximised in this country?

Mr Speaker: Absolutely hopelessly long. Sorry, but that was really hopeless and we have to do a lot better.

Amber Rudd: I share my right hon. Friend’s view that students play an important role in contributing to the economy and are most welcome in the UK. The internationally recognised definition of a “migrant” is someone coming here for more than 12 months, so they are likely to stay within that definition, although I am aware that there are different views on this matter.

Mr Speaker: Perhaps the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee can be the author of the textbook.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker—the pressure is on. The Home Secretary refers to the measure of net migration, but she was asked about the target. Does she agree that international students should be taken out of the Government’s target, as the Foreign Secretary has said over the weekend and as the Chancellor of the Exchequer seemed to hint some weeks ago? Does she think that foreign students should be included in the target?

Amber Rudd: As I told the House, and as the right hon. Lady is aware, there are different views on this. The definition that I referred to was the one for international students, which is held by the Office for National Statistics; more than 12 months and they represent an immigrant, and therefore are part of the numbers.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I am not sure that students are unskilled in any case. Nevertheless, is it not the fact that there are people in this country who will not do the jobs that unskilled migrants do? Is not the point, therefore, that in the black country and elsewhere it should be not Brussels after Brexit but the United Kingdom that will decide which migrants are needed to do the jobs that UK people will not do?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend raises an important point. One in 10 18 to 24-year-olds is still unemployed, and we want them to have the opportunity to take up these jobs. That is one reason why, alongside other initiatives such as the apprenticeship levy, we are encouraging businesses to participate more in local employment and work more with local young people to make sure that they can take those jobs.

Michelle Thomson (Edinburgh West) (Ind): The UK relies on more than 80,000 seasonal workers to pick its fruit and veg every year, with the *Financial Times* recently suggesting that 98% of those workers come from within the EU. Will the Government commit to protecting access for seasonal workers from the EU to safeguard our agricultural sector going forward?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady has raised an important question, and I know that the National Farmers Union met my colleague the Minister for Immigration recently to discuss exactly that point. We are aware how necessary it will be to ensure that we have some sort of seasonal scheme in place, and we are looking carefully at it.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): Has the Home Secretary had any discussions with her Cabinet colleagues about the pull factor of the increase in the living wage and the impact it may have on immigration?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend rightly says that the national living wage could be a pull factor, but other factors are also at play, such as currency fluctuations, which can have the opposite effect, and I urge him to consider those.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Assuming that a deal is reached under which EU citizens who were here before a certain cut-off date can remain after we leave the European Union, can the Home Secretary tell the House how the Home Office will document them—we are talking about an estimated 3 million people—so that employers and landlords will know thereafter to whom legally they can offer a job or accommodation and therefore distinguish them from those EU citizens who arrived after that?

Amber Rudd: The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point. We are aware that there is a certain expectation and concern about the European Union citizens here. As the Prime Minister has said, she hopes to be able to reassure them, but it is right that we do that

while looking also at the over 1 million UK citizens in the rest of the European Union. There will be a need to have some sort of documentation—he is entirely right on that—but we will not set it out yet. We will do it in a phased approach to ensure that we use all the technological advantages that we are increasingly able to harness to ensure that all immigration is carefully handled.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware that the London School of Economics Centre for Economic Performance looked at the issue of immigration employment regionally? It found that the areas with the largest increase in EU immigration had not seen the sharpest falls in employment or wages since 2008. One author of the report said that there was still no evidence of an overall negative impact of immigration on jobs or wages. On the question of students, there is an increasing consensus in all parts of the House that students should be taken out of the immigration target. Technically, anyone who stays more than 12 months may be an immigrant, but in practice, they should not be in the target.

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady might want to take up her interesting views with the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) who seems to take a slightly different view. One thing that is for certain is that when we do leave the European Union, we will have more control over immigration from the European Union and we will be making sure that the immigration that we do get from the European Union achieves the right balance of attracting the type of people who can really boost the UK businesses that need it.

Immigration Rules

2. **Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP):** If she will make an assessment of the potential merits of applying different immigration rules to Scotland and other constituent parts of the UK. [907615]

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): Immigration remains a reserved matter and we will consider the needs of the UK as a whole. Applying different immigration rules to different parts of the United Kingdom will complicate the immigration system, harming its integrity and causing difficulties for employers who need the flexibility to deploy their staff to other parts of the UK.

Stephen Gethins: I know that the Home Secretary agrees with me when we say that Vote Leave was irresponsibly short of detail during its campaign, but one of the details that it did give us was when the former Justice Secretary promised that Scotland would be responsible for its immigration policy. Is that still the case, or is that planned?

Mr Goodwill: If the hon. Gentleman had been paying attention to what I just said, he would know that it remains a UK competency. Given that the Scottish people voted in 2014 to maintain Scotland's position as part of the United Kingdom, may I suggest that he looks at the powers in the Scotland Act 2016 to make Scotland a more attractive place in which people will want to come to live and work?

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Notwithstanding all the attractions of living in Scotland, is not the balance of population movement still to the south?

Mr Goodwill: We do have a specific Scotland shortage occupation list, which recognises the need to attract certain types of occupation to Scotland and which takes account of Scotland's needs.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): One group of families that a distinct immigration system for Scotland would help are the "skype" families. There are 15,000 kids across the United Kingdom who are separated from a parent abroad because this Government have the least family-friendly immigration rules in the whole of the developed world. Almost half of Scotland's people do not earn enough to meet the crazy financial threshold to bring the partner whom they love from abroad to live here. Will the Minister for Immigration allow the Scottish Government to set their own threshold, or how will he explain to those children why they have to live apart from one parent?

Mr Goodwill: At least the Scottish National party is honest about the fact that it wants to increase immigration, unlike the Labour party, which repeatedly refuses to say that that is its policy.

Mr Speaker: I am sure there is no suggestion that anybody would be anything other than honest in this Chamber.

Stuart C. McDonald: What is so difficult about some state variations in immigration rules? Many visas tie people to a specific job and employer. We have Tech City visas, which have special rules for certain UK cities, and we do operate a common travel area and an open border with Ireland, which is a completely distinct immigration system. Does the Secretary of State accept that there is no practical reason why we cannot see significantly different rules applying in Scotland for those significantly different needs?

Mr Goodwill: If the hon. Gentleman were to examine the evidence of the Fresh Talent scheme, which the Scottish Government reviewed in 2008, he would see that only 44% of those applicants remained in Scotland, and more than half of those jobs were not appropriate for the level of education of those who took them.

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a good reason why immigration is a reserved power, and that the slippery slope that the Scottish nationalists are trying to take us down would, if taken to its logical conclusion, end up with a border?

Mr Goodwill: I am always very careful not to get on to slippery slopes, as one ends up at the bottom of the hill in a bad place.

Mr Speaker: Well, one can always come to the Chamber to be illuminated by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Minister cannot get away from the fact, though, that different parts of the country have different labour and immigration needs. In the northern isles at present

our fishing industry is being crippled because white fish boats in particular cannot get the visas for the crews that they need to go to sea. Will the Minister meet me and representatives of the fishing industry to find a way around that?

Mr Goodwill: I recognise the problem and have had meetings with a number of right hon. and hon. Members on the issue. I do not recall, however, that during the referendum campaign the fishermen around the coast of our country were campaigning to repatriate powers so that they could attract more Filipinos to work in the industry. I understand the problem and will continue to meet right hon. and hon. Members to see what we can do to help.

Police Forces

3. **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that police forces better represent the communities they serve. [907617]

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): We have reformed policing to ensure that there is a sector-led approach to improving representation. We established the College of Policing as the professional body which is delivering a major programme of work called BME Progression 2018. Alongside this, innovative schemes such as Direct Entry, Fast Track and Police Now are making the police workforce more diverse than ever before.

David Morris: Does my hon. Friend agree that even though a lot of work has been done, some forces have a long, long way to go to make that quota better?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The police have done a great deal of work on diversity generally, particularly seeing more women coming in, but there is more to do in relation to black and minority ethnic communities and women generally across the force. I hope that forces right across the country will be very focused on this as they go through their recruitment exercises now.

18. [907632] **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): It is difficult for any police force to represent the community it serves, given that cuts to police funding mean that we have lost over 19,000 police officers since 2010. Will the Minister look again, following the bungling of the police funding formula, to make sure that forces such as Northumbria get the fair funding deal that my constituents need and deserve?

Brandon Lewis: Police forces across the country are currently recruiting. The police funding formula has always been protected. We are doing a formula review. I will be meeting the police and crime commissioner and the chief constable of Northumberland shortly to discuss that and feed it into the review. The force there has benefited over the past couple of years from the ability to increase precepts above most others due to de minimis.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): All police officers deserve our praise, but volunteer special constables who serve on foot in the local areas in which they live

represent their local communities particularly well. Will the Minister congratulate Northamptonshire on the efforts that it is making to recruit more volunteer special constables?

Brandon Lewis: I am happy to endorse my hon. Friend's comments. The volunteers in the police force, who we are looking to empower even further through the Policing and Crime Bill, do a fantastic job and deserve our great thanks.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): How long, how long? I do not normally believe in quotas, but really diverse police forces have been a long time coming in this country, so let us see some action. Let us see some action, too, on recruiting more officers to police the roads in our country, where people drive like lunatics because they know that there is no one there to catch them.

Brandon Lewis: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has joined our cause after so many years of seeing diversity going nowhere under the Labour Government. It is this Government who have driven diversity by trusting local police forces to make sure that when they recruit, they recruit to represent their communities. That is why we are seeing BME representation going up and representation of women going up. We need to do more and I hope the hon. Gentleman will join us in encouraging forces to do that in their current recruitment.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Is the Minister aware that a more diverse police force has been an aim of forces such as the Metropolitan police since the 1970s? Is he aware that the underlying reason why there has been limited success is, sadly, continuing poor police-community relations? And is he aware that funding cuts are restricting the recruitment of officers, whatever their colour or gender?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Lady may like to note that this year, as I said earlier, the Government put protection in for police funding in the settlement, so police are benefiting from that protection. Police forces across the country are recruiting. In fact, the Met is one of the exemplars for how to get a diverse workforce; Police Now was literally the first visit I made in this role. The latest recruitment has seen increases to 25% in respect of women. That is good, but we need to go further and I am glad that the hon. Lady wants to join us in seeing that develop.

Freedom of Movement

4. **Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab):** What recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in other EU member states on freedom of movement. [907618]

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): The Prime Minister has made it clear that article 50 will be triggered before the end of March 2017. We are still working hard on our negotiating position, but we do not want to show our hand of cards before we get into the poker game. However, I assure the hon. Lady that we are determined to get the right deal for Britain.

Heidi Alexander: The Government's approach to Brexit seems to hinge on their ability to persuade other European member states to allow Britain to opt out of current freedom of movement rules while retaining tariff-free access to the single market. Can the Minister name me one European Minister who has told him that that might be possible?

Mr Goodwill: There are certainly 3.2 million EU nationals in the UK, and it is in their interests to be able to satisfy their Governments about their status here. As the Prime Minister has said, the only circumstance in which we would not want to guarantee their status would be if the status of UK nationals living elsewhere were not similarly guaranteed.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that free movement of workers, together with the operation of the laws of supply and demand, inevitably depresses wage levels in this country?

Mr Goodwill: I do not have a degree in economics, but it is true that supply and demand would operate in this area. That is why we are determined to be able to control the numbers of those coming from the EU, just as we already control numbers coming from outside the EU.

Dame Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab): In any discussions, will the Minister raise the issue referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin): recruitment agencies, for example, that exploit workers from the EU and undercut UK workers by advertising for unskilled workers outside the UK, but not in the UK?

Mr Goodwill: All these matters will need to be discussed, but I add the point already made by the Home Secretary. When the eastern European countries joined the European Union, transitional arrangements that would have protected jobs to some extent were not put in place.

Knife Crime

5. **James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con):** What steps her Department is taking to tackle knife crime. [907619]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): Tackling knife crime is a priority and we are taking firm action, including warning young people about the dangers of carrying knives, working with retailers both online and on the high street, and legislating for tougher sentences. During October, 21 police forces took part in a week of action against knife crime. In Essex, test purchases were conducted, habitual knife carriers were stopped and searched, and 12 individuals were arrested.

James Duddridge: I thank the Minister for reminding us of the action that Essex police are already taking. Over a four-month period, the knife amnesty got 311 knives off the streets. Will the Minister commit to continuing a knife amnesty and will she come to Southend to see the complexities and interaction between knife crime and drugs crime in Southend?

Sarah Newton: I am very grateful to my colleague for raising that point and I will be delighted to visit him in Southend. He will be pleased to know that the Home Office is working with the Essex police and crime commissioner, along with the Institute of Community Safety, to see what more we can do to help the situation in Essex. I understand that they will agree a plan of local action during a meeting this week.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Last week, a memorial service was held in Leicester for Tyler Thompson, who was killed with a knife aged only 16. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) said that 311 knives had been given in during the amnesty in Essex. Does the Minister have the figures for the whole country?

Sarah Newton: I do not have the answer to hand at the moment, but this was the first week, with 21 forces engaged in Operation Sceptre. That had a hugely beneficial effect, in terms of not only the surrendering of weapons across the country but arrests across the country. It sent out an incredibly clear, firm message: we will not tolerate people carrying knives as they will use them harmfully on innocent citizens.

Asset Recovery Regime

6. **David Warburton** (Somerton and Frome) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to confiscate money from criminals; and what plans she has further to strengthen the asset recovery regime. [907620]

9. **Andrew Bingham** (High Peak) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to confiscate money from criminals; and what plans she has further to strengthen the asset recovery regime. [907623]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): Since 2010, £1.2 billion of criminal assets have been recovered, and a further £3 billion have been frozen. The Serious Crime Act 2015 provided new powers, and the Criminal Finances Bill will further improve our capability, but there is more to be done. Next year we will publish a new asset recovery action plan, and the Cabinet Office will look at the UK's response to economic crime more broadly. This will include looking at the effectiveness of our organisational framework and the capabilities, resources and powers available to the organisations that tackle economic crime.

David Warburton: I thank the Home Secretary for that. The Criminal Finances Bill contains many measures to combat illegal and immoral financial activity, but can my right hon. Friend confirm that the new law enforcement measures in relation to unexplained wealth orders will ensure not only that we can better combat illegal activity but that the principles of transparency will be upheld?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend raises a really important point. Unexplained wealth orders will send a powerful statement to those who wish to launder the proceeds of their crimes in the UK. They are an investigative power and so will be subject to the same court rules that apply to the existing civil recovery investigative powers.

Andrew Bingham: What my right hon. Friend says is welcome, but can she assure me that the asset recovery regime will extend to all forms of crime, and particularly tax evasion? The potential financial gains from tax evasion are large, and whatever people think about it being a victimless crime, it is wrong, and the regime should apply to it as well.

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is an important part of the new proceeds of crime legislation, and, yes, it will be included in it.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): What discussions is the Home Secretary having with her European counterparts to ensure that once we leave the European Union, we will have access to all the data we can currently access in relation to assets held abroad?

Amber Rudd: I can reassure the hon. Lady that I am having extensive discussions with European counterparts and with European bodies that help to keep us safe, so that when we do leave the European Union, we will, as far as possible, be able to have access to that information. When people voted to leave the European Union, they did not vote to be less safe.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Further to that, the simple question is: will we be a member of Europol post exit from the European Union?

Amber Rudd: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that we recently opted into the new elements of Europol. In terms of looking forward, we are in discussions on that matter. I can tell him that we are one of the largest contributors to Europol. We play an important part in it. It will be part of the ongoing negotiations.¹

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): What practical measures have been put in place to combat money laundering and terrorist financing?

Amber Rudd: I refer my hon. Friend to the new legislation. She is absolutely right that the trouble is that criminals will always try to get ahead of us in finding ways to launder their money and the proceeds of their activities. We are determined to make sure that we get ahead of them, which is why we are having the new legislation put in place.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware that the cross-border flow of proceeds from criminal activity, corruption and tax evasion is estimated at over \$1 trillion a year, and that half that money was looted from poor and developing countries? What steps is she taking to make it easier for these poor countries to recover stolen assets from UK, Crown dependency and overseas territory financial institutions?

Amber Rudd: We take dealing with the proceeds of crime incredibly seriously, and the idea that there are people who commit criminal acts and then come to the UK is very unwelcome. One of the elements we have to deal with that is the new unexplained wealth orders. They do apply to foreign persons also in the UK, and they will go part of the way to addressing exactly what the hon. Lady describes in terms of the transfer of illegal funds.

1. [Official Report, 12 December 2016, Vol. 618, c. 3-4MC.]

Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children

8. **Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that individual local authorities do not bear a disproportionate burden for supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. [907622]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): In July the Government launched the national transfer scheme to ensure a more equitable distribution of unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children across the country. The scheme is designed to support local authorities like Peterborough City Council. In support of the national transfer scheme we also increased central Government funding to local authorities caring for unaccompanied children by up to 33%.

Mr Jackson: Will my right hon. Friend reassure me that in areas such as Peterborough, which has already borne a major burden in both EU and non-EU migration, we will not be expected to pay once again for the huge ongoing costs of children and young people who are unaccompanied minors—we have 40 such cases in Peterborough—and that we will receive bespoke central Government funding?

Amber Rudd: I can reassure my hon. Friend that each child that his council looks after does attract additional funding, so I hope that that will address his particular financial concerns about the council's obligations. I would like to put on record our grateful thanks to Peterborough Council, which does a fantastic and generous job in looking after some of these most needy children.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Unlike almost every other EU country, the UK does not allow unaccompanied child refugees to sponsor their parents to join them—a situation that the Home Affairs Committee has described as “perverse”. Does the Home Secretary agree that it is in the best interests of the refugee children, as well as in the interests of our society, to allow them to be with their parents?

Amber Rudd: I understand the hon. Gentleman's motive in making this point. However, I would respectfully say to him that that could have a very detrimental effect in terms of a pull factor, with children coming to this country—potentially being sent or indeed trafficked to this country—in order to have their parents brought over; so no, we will not be looking at it again.

16. [907630] **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): How is the Modern Slavery Act 2015 going to affect the burden that is put on local authorities?

Amber Rudd: On the burden put on local authorities, one of the elements to which I refer them is the controlling migration fund—a new source of funds that I hope they will be able to access to support unaccompanied minors. On the Modern Slavery Act, I will have to get back to my hon. Friend.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Child protection organisations such as ECPAT UK fear that a lack of support and resources is preventing some authorities from offering the required level of professional services to adequately protect vulnerable children from traffickers.

Why are over a quarter of local authorities unable to participate in the national transfer scheme for unaccompanied children? Will the Home Secretary agree to look at this as a matter of urgency?

Amber Rudd: The funds that we put in place to support unaccompanied children represent a sum that we agreed after consultation with local authorities to work out the costs. It is the average cost. We acknowledge that some children will have different needs and will therefore end up being more expensive, and some less so. We hope that this is the right amount to be able to support them. We believe that it is the right amount. We are always willing to try to listen to local authorities if they have other suggestions. I particularly refer them to the controlling migration fund, which we hope will be able to give additional support.

Recorded Offences

10. **Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): What the proportion of (a) charges and (b) convictions for crimes of violence against the person was relative to recorded offences in the most recent year for which data are available. [907624]

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): For the year ending June 2016, 16% of violence against the person offences recorded by the police resulted in a charge or summons. There were almost 30,000 convictions for violence against the person offences in the year ending June 2016. That represents over 75% of the people prosecuted and shows a rise of more than 1,500 convictions on the previous year.

Joan Ryan: According to the Home Office data on crime in England and Wales, violence against the person and sexual offences have risen under this Government and their predecessor, while charges have fallen or broadly stayed the same, as in the case of sexual offences. In Enfield, we have seen an 11% increase in violent crime over the past year. Why should people trust the Government when public safety is being put at risk via these statistics and falling police numbers?

Brandon Lewis: The right hon. Lady may be confusing recorded crime with actual crime. The crime survey shows that violence is down by over 25% since 2010. We are seeing an increase in recorded crime. We should welcome that, because it shows a better recording of crime, and also, importantly, a willingness of victims to come forward.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): In 2014, the current Prime Minister said that there were “utterly unacceptable failings in the way police forces have recorded crime”

and that this has let down victims. yet all three forces inspected this August are not recording crimes properly. In Manchester, 17,000 violent crimes were simply ignored. Will the Minister tell this House why his Prime Minister failed to make any progress in two years?

Brandon Lewis: The Prime Minister—the previous Home Secretary—and the current Home Secretary are seeing a reduction in crime. The police should be proud of that while running things efficiently for the benefit of the

taxpayer. There is also an increase in recorded crime, which, as the Office for National Statistics itself has outlined, is because of the willingness of victims to come forward as a result of their increased confidence in the police to deal with the issues. That is to be welcomed.

Freedom of Expression (Religious Satire)

12. **Mr Charles Walker** (Broxbourne) (Con): What legal protections are in place to protect people's freedom of expression with regard to religious satire. [907626]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): Freedom of speech and religion are core values that make our country great. They are, indeed, protected in law. What is or is not a joke, or what constitutes satire, is, I believe, in the eye or ear of the beholder and is not, perhaps, for Government to opine on.

Mr Walker: Why did the Home Secretary and her Ministers not give voice to those principles during the manhunt and vilification of the gymnast Louis Smith?

Amber Rudd: One of the first actions that I took when I came to office in July was to publish a hate crime action plan, to which I refer my hon. Friend. It enables anybody who is the victim of any sort of hate crime, which I think is what he is referring to, to have the confidence to report what is going on and to make sure that the police take action so that they do not feel singled out and abused.

Immigration Detention/Adults at Risk Policy

13. **Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): If she will take steps to (a) ensure that survivors of sexual and other gender-based violence are only held in immigration detention as a last resort and (b) monitor the effective implementation of the adults at risk policy. [907627]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): The intention of the adults at risk policy, developed as a result of the review by Stephen Shaw, is part of a wider programme of work that aims to improve the way in which vulnerable people in detention are managed. That should enable the delivery of the issue raised by the hon. Lady. The policy came into effect on 12 September, and the intention is to ask Stephen Shaw to carry out a short review in 2017 to assess progress.

Jess Phillips: The Government's commitment to reduce the number of survivors of sexual violence in detention is welcome, but how will observers know whether that is happening? Is information now being collected on the numbers of women in detention who disclose that they are victims of sexual violence, and will that information be made available?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Lady is right to point out that we are taking a significant package of measures to make sure that people are detained for the minimum time possible, that their vulnerabilities are properly recognised and understood, and that access to mental

health and other health services is made available. As I have said, we will ask for an independent review in the course of the year, to make sure that that is working.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The Istanbul convention, which the Government have yet to ratify, requires countries to develop gender-sensitive reception procedures, such as women-only accommodation. What steps are the Government taking to guarantee the safety of women in initial accommodation, including women and children-only corridors?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Lady is right to point out the importance of making sure that women are safe. It is the absolute priority of this Government to keep women and girls safe, including in our detention system. The Government have signed and will ratify the Istanbul convention and, as the hon. Lady knows, we are well exceeding all its targets.

Fraud

14. **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): What steps she is taking to protect people from fraud and its effect on families and communities. [907628]

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): We have established a joint fraud taskforce, bringing together Government, law enforcement and the financial sector to tackle the crime of fraud. The recent arrest of 14 individuals involved in laundering the proceeds of international cybercrime also demonstrates how a multi-agency approach, including international partners, is crucial in tackling cybercrime and cyber-enabled fraud.

Mrs Murray: Fraud, both in person and online, is of great concern to my constituents in South East Cornwall, particularly among the elderly and vulnerable. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating voluntary organisations such as citizens advice bureau and Victim Support on their work in supporting fraud prevention through education and in supporting victims of crime?

Mr Wallace: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out the very important work that many voluntary bodies do in raising awareness. Citizens Advice, Age Concern and Victim Support make sure, including in the lead-up to Christmas, that people are aware of the pitfalls that await them online and of the scandalous fraudsters who pick on some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I certainly welcome any voluntary work that can be done, but as the level of fraud now stands at £193 billion a year and as local police forces are clearly completely unable to cope, we really need a far more serious strategy from Government to tackle the spectre of online crime. Will the Minister tell us what more can be done to support local police forces and provide some protection for our constituents?

Mr Wallace: First, that is why we established the joint fraud taskforce, which includes police and crime commissioners, police forces and victims groups, to make sure that we co-ordinate better our response. It is also why the Government have sponsored and supported

the Cyber Aware campaign and Cyber Essentials, to help to make businesses aware of the fraud that awaits them, and banks have sponsored the Take Five campaign. In addition, the national cyber-security strategy sets out a programme in which the Government have invested billions of pounds to make sure that our law enforcement agencies have the capacity to tackle that crime when it is presented to them.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Police have described so-called binary options betting websites that masquerade as investment vehicles as the biggest scam and fraud being perpetrated in the UK. What do the Government intend doing about them?

Mr Wallace: When one of those websites is reported through Action Fraud, our law and order agencies set about trying to make sure we either dismantle it or signpost people away from such areas. In Scotland that is devolved, and it is up to Police Scotland. The broader picture is to make sure that the public and the consumer are aware of what awaits them online, and that they take some very basic steps to protect themselves when they are, for example, Christmas shopping to ensure that fraudsters do not take their money away.

Illegal Migrants

17. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that illegal migrants cannot profit from working in the UK. [907631]

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): In July this year we implemented new powers in the Immigration Act 2016 to prevent migrants from profiting from working illegally, by making that a criminal offence. That ensures that the profits of working illegally can be seized as the proceeds of crime, and assets may be confiscated on conviction.

Nigel Mills: I thank the Minister for that answer and ask him to set out to the House what other measures the Government are taking to ensure that those who are here illegally cannot access UK benefits, such as housing or welfare payments.

Mr Goodwill: I reassure my hon. Friend that adults with no legal status here are not eligible to receive public funds in that way.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Victims of people trafficking tell me that they are often prevented from assisting in criminal prosecutions against individuals from abroad who commit criminal offences because they do not have any access to public funds. What discussions has the Home Office had with the Ministry of Justice concerning providing support to victims of people trafficking?

Mr Goodwill: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that if people who are here illegally have been exploited through modern slavery because they have been trafficked, it is important that we treat them with a degree of compassion and respect, and that we treat them differently from people who are not in that situation.

Leaving the EU: Departmental Staff

19. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): What assessment her Department has made of the implications of the UK leaving the EU for (a) the number of and (b) skills required by its staff. [907633]

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): The Home Office constantly reviews its capabilities in order to deliver the Government's agenda. Work is under way to understand and respond to the immediate capability impacts as a result of the decision to leave the European Union.

Tom Brake: The Secretary of State has just confirmed that the 3 million EU citizens in the UK will have to be documented. If that processing adds roughly 10% to the Home Office workload, does the Minister accept that it will cost at least £100 million a year and require 3,000 extra staff? If he does not, what is his estimate?

Mr Goodwill: Let me make it clear that people who are here from elsewhere in the EU working legally do not need to receive additional documentation at this time. I reassure them that their status is assured. What happens in the future is a matter for the negotiations, but I make it absolutely clear that no additional documentation is needed at this stage.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): May I make the case to the Minister for updating the systems and the use of computers and information technology in border control—particularly as, with Brexit, we will need to count people in and count people out more effectively—and for investment in our ports, such as the port of Dover?

Mr Goodwill: Certainly, exit checks introduced in 2015 have given us an additional tool to track people as they enter and, in particular, leave the country. New technology, such as e-gates, has helped very much in that regard.

Terrorist Attacks

21. **Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure that police and security services have the necessary powers to apprehend people planning terrorist attacks in the UK. [907636]

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): The internet presents new opportunities for terrorists, and we must ensure we have the capabilities to confront this challenge. The Investigatory Powers Act 2016 ensures that law enforcement and the security and intelligence agencies have the powers they need in the digital age to disrupt terrorist attacks, subject to strict safeguards and world-leading oversight. The Criminal Finances Bill will add to the ability of UK law enforcement to identify, investigate and disrupt terrorist finance activity.

Sir Simon Burns: Does my hon. Friend agree that the passing of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 is important for ensuring that our security services and law enforcement agencies are able to combat those who wish to do us harm?

Mr Wallace: Yes, it is. It is also important to recognise that it is all very well the agencies having the capability, but they must also have the capacity. That is why, over the next five years, the Government are making an extra £2.5 billion available to the security agencies. We will use that to strengthen our counter-terrorism network abroad and at home.

23. [907638] **John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm how much the Government are investing to boost the United Kingdom's capability to respond quickly to a firearms attack, particularly in the light of what has happened on the continent?

Mr Wallace: Overall counter-terrorism and police spending has been protected in real terms against the 2015-16 baseline over the spending review period. Following the recent European attacks, we revised our risk assessments and are delivering an uplift in our specialist response capability, which includes a £144 million programme over the next five years to uplift our armed policing so that we can respond more quickly and effectively to a firearms attack.

Mr Speaker: We are past 3.15, but that has never bothered me, and it would be unkind to the point of cruelty to exclude the hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), from whom the House will wish to hear.

Violence against Women and Girls

22. **Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle violence against women and girls. [907637]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): In March, we published the new violence against women and girls strategy, which sets out an ambitious programme of reform, supported by increased funding of £80 million, to make tackling these crimes everybody's business, to ensure that victims get the support they need and to bring more perpetrators to justice. We have also introduced a new domestic abuse offence to capture coercive control, and consulted on new measures to protect victims of stalking.

Michelle Donelan: As a trustee of Helping Victims of Domestic Violence, a local domestic abuse charity in my constituency, I have seen at first hand just how worrying domestic abuse and sexual offences can be. Will the Minister meet me and the police and crime commissioner in my constituency to see what more we can do together?

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend is right to pay tribute to the voluntary sector organisations that do so much to support victims. I would be delighted to meet her and the police and crime commissioner for her constituency to see what more we can do to support those victims.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Does the Minister share my concern that Survivors Hull and East Riding, which has supported local victims of sexual trauma for more than two decades, is about to close because of a lack of funding? Would she be willing to meet me to discuss what more resources can go into providing a service locally for those victims?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Lady is right to raise that case. I am horrified to hear of such a valued service facing that situation. I would be very pleased to meet her to see what we can do to access funding.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): There were 18,000 domestic violence offences against women in the last year in Leeds alone, so there are still far too many. Does the Minister agree that we need to do more to educate boys and men about this crime so that that figure comes down considerably?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point about the important role that men can play and the importance of educating young people about appropriate sexual relationships. He will be pleased to know that world-class resources are available to do that not only from the Home Office, but from the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre. More such work is going on in schools than ever before.

Topical Questions

T1. [907654] **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): To mark the UN's 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, it is vital that we work together across Government and across political parties to do all that we can to end violence against women and girls. As I made clear at the College of Policing conference last week, protecting vulnerable people is one of my top priorities. As the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) said, we must include men in that as well. Last week, I hosted an event with ministerial colleagues, campaign groups and survivors to raise awareness of and demonstrate my commitment to ending female genital mutilation within a generation. This Conservative Government will continue to take steps to achieve our ambition that no woman should live in fear of abuse, and that every girl should grow up feeling safe and protected.

Fiona Mactaggart: Despite those good intentions, twice as many women report rape now than four years ago, and the proportion of reports that lead to successful prosecutions has gone down. In my constituency, I speak to women who have been raped and had to wait up to 20 months for specialist counselling. When will the Home Secretary improve the care for victims of violence?

Amber Rudd: The right hon. Lady will be aware that we encourage the reporting of crime, particularly rape. We want people to have the confidence to do that and to know they will be treated well. We absolutely recognise the need for funding to support people, which is why the new violence against women and girls strategy has been launched, and we have pledged an increase of £80 million to 2020 to make sure we do just that.

T2. [907655] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): The Waveney domestic violence forum is concerned that judges are requiring it to admit to its caring dads programme violent fathers who are uninterested and show no remorse. It is finding it difficult to run these programmes when

some attendees want to be there and others do not. Will Ministers work with the Ministry of Justice to resolve this problem?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): My hon. Friend raises an important point, and I appreciate the concerns of the Waveney domestic violence forum. I can assure him that I am working closely with the Secretary of State for Justice to improve the family justice response to domestic abuse, and with the judiciary to consider what additional protections might be necessary. We are also supporting innovative pilots, working with perpetrators of domestic abuse, which include disruption as well as support.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The worrying rise in post-referendum hate crime, which we all condemn, has disproportionately affected women—we have seen hijabs ripped off girls, death threats to Gina Miller and family, and the tweet at the weekend about wanting to “Jo Cox” the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). Thankfully the instigator of the tweet has now been charged. Are the Government, after years of inactivity towards social media platforms, embarrassed by this burgeoning abuse of women on and offline? Is it not another aspect of Brexit for which they clearly had no plan?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Lady is right to raise these horrendous crimes, which have no place in our society, but she is wrong to say that we have been sitting on our hands. We have introduced not only the hate crime strategy but a whole series of offences, for which I am pleased to see the police successfully prosecuting people. We have also done groundbreaking work with the internet industry, which is taking seriously its responsibility to take down dreadful incidents of online hate crime.

T3. [907657] **Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): As I am sure the Minister will be aware, Sutton is a low-crime London borough—I commend the excellent work that the local police force does to keep it so—but in the past few weeks there have been three serious assaults on our high street, including two involving knives. What more can the Government do to tackle knife crime in London boroughs and places such as Sutton?

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend is right to raise this serious situation. I commend him and the Metropolitan police which, along with other police forces, has been working on Operation Sceptre, which includes knife sweeps. I recommend that he speaks to the head of Sutton Borough Council to see if they are interested in working with the Institute of Community Safety to undertake an area review and make sure that everything is being done to stop this dreadful crime.

T4. [907658] **Mr Nick Clegg** (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): Last Thursday, I met Jenny Hockey, a 70-year-old retired sociology lecturer who was, extraordinarily, arrested on 17 November as part of a council-directed dawn raid to chop down six trees on her street, with the assistance of 12 officers from South Yorkshire police against—it now turns out—the views of the local police and crime

commissioner. What assurances can the Home Secretary give the House that in future councils do not drag police officers into such absurd, draconian initiatives?

Amber Rudd: The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise this issue. It is a local matter, of course, but it sounds like that important balance we tread between peaceful protest and responding to the law might have been handled in a rather tricky way in his constituency. I would always urge that peaceful protest is allowed, but I wonder sometimes whether police forces strike the right balance, as in the example he has given.

T5. [907659] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): My right hon. Friend's predecessor wisely introduced a two-year visitor visa for China. What plans does she have to extend that to countries that are developing and are our key business partners, such as India?

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): As was made clear during the Prime Minister's recent and very successful visit to India, it is one of our largest visa markets, and we continue to make improvements to the visa service by expanding our priority services, including new products, and expanding our reach of visa application centres across India. There continue to be large numbers of visa applications from India. Indeed, the latest figures we have, for last year, show that 385,000 Indian nationals visited the UK—an increase of 6% year on year.

T7. [907661] **Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): The chief constable of Northumbria police has dismissed the idea that Britain's exit from the EU would lead to a reduction in the number of foreign criminals operating in the UK. Under the Government's soft Brexit, do they intend to retain their participation in the European arrest warrant framework?

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it is not appropriate for us to outline our negotiations as they are ongoing. I will say, however, that, as both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have clearly outlined, we put security first, and the security and safety of our citizens is paramount for this Government.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): A fire at an illegal waste site in Slitting Mill caused weeks of distress for local residents, and significant cost to Staffordshire fire and rescue. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss what additional changes to the law can be made to prevent such instances, as well as how the costs incurred by the fire service can be recovered from the site operators?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend has previously raised this issue with me on behalf of her area's fire service. I appreciate that what the fire service had to deal with was really challenging. Balancing out the best way to deal with the problem itself incurs costs, so I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss it.

T8. [907662] **Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Why do the Government have no data at all on what happens to victims of human trafficking after they exit

Government-funded shelters, or about how many go back to their traffickers? The all-party group specifically raised this matter in a report five years ago, and the Government promised to respond. Will the Secretary of State tell us what the Department has done?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this issue; we are pressing to do exactly that. I have spoken to Kevin Hyland, the independent commissioner, about this subject, and I have had a roundtable on working with commissioners and the police force to ensure that the police not only press charges, but collect the information from the victims of modern slavery, so that we can make sure that investigations can lead to convictions. I share the hon. Lady's views.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Why has the Home Office blocked three Iraqi Syrian bishops from coming to the UK to consecrate the first Syriac Orthodox church? Is it not at least disrespectful and probably shameful that they have been given the reason that they do not have enough money or that they might not leave the UK at a time when we should be showing solidarity with Church leaders at the frontline of persecution?

Mr Goodwill: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual cases, but let me say that all these applications are considered on their individual merits, in line with UK immigration rules and guidance. There is no policy of denying entry clearance for visas from Syrian nationals.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): In the first nine months of this year, there were almost 600 assaults on police officers in the West Midlands police force alone. Will the Minister meet me, representatives of the Police Federation and my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) to discuss the growing problem of assaults on emergency service workers?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the debates we have had in the Chamber and elsewhere about this issue. It is completely unacceptable to see any kind of assault on a police officer, and that is an aggravating factor. We are working with the Ministry of Justice and are in contact with the Sentencing Council, which is independent, on this issue. I shall meet the Police Federation in the next few days.

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): I welcome the recently announced Home Office measures on police competence to investigate sexual offences. Will the Home Secretary accept from me that it is time for the police service, and particularly the Met police, to take a serious look at their respective detective training regimes, which I suggest are at the core of the unfortunate publicity?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Home Secretary outlined last week the importance we place on this issue. It is important, as we saw with the Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary inspection, that the Met police takes the opportunity to get to grips with training to ensure that its teams are properly trained to deal with these delicate issues.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): If the refugee family reunion section of UK immigration rules was widened, many refugee children could arrive directly

from the conflict region rather than via Calais. Will the Home Secretary commit to look again at these rules so that children do not have to risk their lives to be with their families?

Amber Rudd: We are constantly looking at our immigration rules to ensure that we have the right balance to support vulnerable children on the continent—most of them coming from Calais—whom we are trying to help, but we have other programmes that enable us to give direct help to vulnerable children who are out in the conflict regions.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): As the Home Secretary knows, those of us with coastal constituencies in the south of England are feeling particularly vulnerable to the activities of people traffickers who are bringing illegal immigrants across in private boats. What measures have been taken since the review of small ports and airports that was promised by the previous intelligence Minister?

Amber Rudd: I share my hon. Friend's view that we need to be constantly vigilant in case people traffickers are trying to get ahead of us, and if they fall between the cracks of our security and ply their evil trade. We have launched a number of initiatives, including Operation Kraken, which enables us to work closely with voluntary and private sector groups along the coast to ensure that any incidents are reported.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The Government seem determined to place restrictions on freedom of movement at the heart of Brexit, but the horticultural sector is heavily dependent on 80,000 workers a year coming from the European Union to work. Will the Government commit themselves to ensuring that Brexit, whatever form it takes, will not leave the industry in the lurch, and that it will continue to get the workers it needs?

Mr Goodwill: The result of the referendum made it clear that we need to control the number of people coming from the European Union, and the negotiations will take that and other matters into account.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Past waves of immigration have proved successful because of the integration of new communities into existing ones. The report by Louise Casey has not yet been published, but it has been said that it suggests a form of cultural separatism in the Islamic community. Is that true and, if so, will we be responding to the report in an appropriately thoughtful way?

Amber Rudd: My right hon. Friend's question gives me an opportunity to thank Louise Casey for her report, and to say to him and the House that we will of course study it carefully to learn better how to improve integration in our communities.

Mr Speaker: I trust that we shall be hearing about it in the House before very long. In fact, I think I can say that with complete certainty.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): What steps are the Government taking to identify and address criminal activity associated with Scottish limited partnerships?

The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace): That question has been raised by other SNP Members during the passage of the Criminal Finances Bill. I shall be meeting them shortly to discuss it, and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has agreed to conduct a review.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. These chaps have already spoken. I think I will call Alison Thewliss.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker; that is very generous of you.

I am currently dealing with two ongoing constituency cases that have been caused entirely by incompetence on the part of VFS Global. One of them involves a granny who is stuck in Iran and cannot go to Scotland to see her daughter and newly born granddaughter in Glasgow because of the ludicrous booking system for visa appointments. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me to discuss the issue?

Mr Goodwill: As the Immigration Minister, I should be delighted to meet the hon. Lady to discuss that specific issue.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Will the Home Secretary indulge my obsession? Will she tell me what plans she has after Brexit to redesign our passports after Brexit—and will they be blue-black?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution to this vital debate, and I look forward to further discussions with him about the best way to handle it.

Mr Speaker: That is very reassuring.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): A person has been convicted and will spend the rest of his life in prison for the murder of four young men. Is the Home Secretary aware of that murder, and is she aware that if the police in London had acted differently, two of those lives might well have been saved? It is unfortunate, to say the least, that the Met, when investigating murder, seems on occasions to model itself on Inspector Clouseau.

Brandon Lewis: I shall be happy to look into the specifics of the case but, as the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, I cannot comment on them here. Obviously

the Metropolitan police are out there every day investigating and preventing crime for the benefit of London.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Will the Policing Minister assure me that, when the review of the formula for policing allocations is conducted, the needs of rural constabularies such as Wiltshire will be properly considered?

Brandon Lewis: I can say to my hon. Friend that, in the funding formula review, we are looking at all aspects. Rural forces are feeding directly into that. I am aware of the issues that they are raising. We will look at that and feed back on it as we go through the review.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Many Russian nationals who were involved in the murder of Sergei Magnitsky and the corruption that he unveiled have harboured their assets in the UK. An opportunity to deal with that issue has been provided by the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and 27 other Members in the form of an amendment to the Criminal Finances Bill. Will the Government now support that so that we can keep Russian corruption out of London?

Mr Wallace: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. I met his colleagues and my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab) to discuss that matter. The Department is looking at the amendment as tabled. We already have a number of powers to deal with people who have been accused in this area. However, we will look at the amendment and reflect on it. We will get back to Members on Report.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am sure that Ministers will want to join me in welcoming the first Syrian family to arrive in my constituency under the community sponsorship scheme and to congratulate St Monica's parishioners, who are providing support to the family, but will Ministers also look at the wider funding and commissioning arrangements across all Greater Manchester local authorities for the support of asylum seekers and refugees to ensure that we can look after all these people properly?

Amber Rudd: I join the hon. Lady in congratulating her constituents on welcoming the family. I also congratulate all the community groups who have generously stepped forward to welcome families. Often those families need a lot of assistance—for example, help with their children, with translation and with learning the English language. Having community support around them is so helpful. Of course, I will keep the support under review.

NEW MEMBER

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath required by law:

Sarah Jane Olney, for Richmond Park.

Southern Rail

3.38 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Southern rail.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Maynard): Performance on the Southern network has been affected by a combination of factors over the previous months. Those have included trade union action, infrastructure reliability and operator issues. The unions have stepped up their industrial action in the run-up to Christmas, additionally co-ordinating it with action on the underground network.

Let me be clear: this strike action is politically motivated and has affected passengers for far too long. Union leaders have even described the action as “carrying on Fidel’s work.” That will be of no comfort to passengers who just want to get to work.

I have a letter in my folder to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) from the director of railway safety at the Office of Rail and Road. Responding to the safety concern from the unions, Ian Prosser says “DOO is safe.” The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and ASLEF should not be misleading the public about their dispute with Govia Thameslink Railway. Once again I can assure the hard-working staff of the GTR franchise that no train staff are losing pay and no one is losing their job.

Passengers want and deserve improvements, which is why in September the Secretary of State appointed Chris Gibb, a leading railway professional, to work with the operator and with Network Rail to identify areas in which performance on the network can be improved quickly. Some of these £20 million interventions are under way and would be making a significant difference by now, were it not for the fact that owing to continued industrial action by the RMT and now planned action by ASLEF, Southern rail services are to be subject to further delays and alterations now and over the coming weeks.

In recognition of the disruption to services this year, the Secretary of State announced on 2 December a refund package that will compensate season ticket holders with a package equivalent to one free month in acknowledgment of the exceptional issues experienced this year. He also announced that GTR will be the first franchise to introduce Delay Repay 15, starting on 11 December. Compensation alone is not enough, however. We have to restore a timely, reliable and predictable train service. That is why the work of Mr Gibb is focusing on reducing the network rail faults, and why we have new safe driver-only operation trains that can cope with the volume of people wanting to use them. It is why I will continue to ensure that the management of the train operating company is doing everything in its power to run improved services. But we also need the union leaders to stop their needless, unreasonable, disproportionate and politically motivated strikes.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the Minister for his reply. I am putting this question today with the support of Members from right across the House. On Friday, we heard that Southern rail services were to be severely

[*Caroline Lucas*]

disrupted every day from tomorrow until further notice. However, that grim warning of imminent service collapse comes after more than two years of rail chaos, which started long before any strike action began. Back in May 2015, the then rail Minister said that our services were “flashing red” in her Department. Eighteen months on, my constituents are regularly in tears of anger and frustration, jobs are being lost, relationships are being broken up and the economy is being seriously damaged. This situation is intolerable, and the Government cannot simply wash their hands of any involvement. Will the Minister roll up his sleeves and get stuck into resolving the crisis? The Transport Select Committee has called for all parties involved to sit down together and resolve the dispute, so will he convene a meeting with the unions and GTR to work this out and restore reliability to this vital public service? In so doing, he would be showing that he is not prepared to allow this crucial piece of infrastructure simply to collapse.

To end the stalemate, will the Department take charge of this contract in the open and strip GTR of the franchise and bring it back in house? That would at least increase the transparency around what is going on. When, for example, will a concrete timetable for GTR to publicly report its performance be revealed? Will performance data be published daily or weekly, and where will they be published? This contract and information about it are shrouded in secrecy, and it is time to make it accountable. Will the Minister answer the outstanding questions on the force majeure application from GTR? Will he provide urgent clarity about whether GTR is in default? The Transport Committee called for a decision on whether GTR was in default by early November 2016. It is now December. Why has the Minister not answered on time?

I do not think the Minister has any idea of the pain that passengers and businesses in Brighton and beyond are suffering. If he did, he would be doing more about it. We have a catastrophic stalemate. What exactly is he going to do about it? My constituents in Brighton want to hear that he is going to get involved. Anything else is not enough.

Paul Maynard: I am grateful for the hon. Lady’s urgent question. The best thing she can do on behalf of her constituents is to go and speak to her close friends in the RMT and tell them to call off their disproportionate and unreasonable industrial action. That is the best contribution she can make.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Thank you for calling me during this urgent question, Mr Speaker, which is important because it is about not only the Brighton main line, but communities in my area. Students trying to get to school from Edenbridge on the Redhill to Tonbridge line and people trying to get to work on the Uckfield line have endured misery. This is about the unions, but the nationalised Network Rail has also failed us again and again. Will the Minister please get on with sorting out that organisation, too?

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend is entirely right to point out the impact on his constituents in Kent. I travelled to Sevenoaks today through London Bridge and saw some delays. The only long-term solution for

this overburdened part of the network is for both Network Rail and the train operating companies to align the incentives and work together to fix the underlying problems that plague the network.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): That this House is still having to address the abysmal service provided by Southern after a year and a half of sub-standard service is testimony to both Southern’s incompetence and the extent to which the Government are committed to privatised rail, even when franchises have become so deeply dysfunctional that they are unable to provide a decent public service. GTR should have been stripped of its franchise long ago for failing to plan properly to take on the franchise, as it has admitted, and for providing what is by far the country’s worst rail service. Hon. Members whose constituents rely on Southern will be well aware of stories of passengers fainting on overcrowded trains, jobs being jeopardised by repeated lateness and parents having to say goodnight to their children from a delayed train.

The Government have defended Southern to the hilt, excusing all its failings as the consequences of an easily avoidable, resolvable industrial dispute, allowing the cancellation of hundreds of services a week and repeatedly throwing taxpayers’ money at the problem as a sticking plaster on an irredeemably dysfunctional concession franchise. The Minister mentioned Mr Gibb, but why did we not hear about Mr Wilkinson, who stood up in Croydon and said that he wants dust-ups with the RMT and to starve staff back to work and to get them out of his railway industry? He is the sort of person the Minister ought to be talking about.

On Friday, it was announced that Southern season ticket holders would be eligible to receive compensation equivalent to one month’s travel. Yet more taxpayers’ money is being spent on the service following the £20 million committed to Southern just a few months ago. The compensation will apply to some 84,000 passengers, but Southern is responsible for 620,000 passenger journeys a day. While any amount of compensation for passengers is welcome, will the Minister take this opportunity to acknowledge that the measures announced on Friday will not come close to compensating the majority of passengers who have suffered from Southern’s abysmal services for the past year and a half? Considering the 1.8% fare rise scheduled for the start of next year, the few commuters who receive compensation will see it wiped out by inflation-busting fares. Sadly, a decent rail service—

Hon. Members: Sit down!

Mr Speaker: Order. I know how to deal with such matters. Members are taking too long. The Minister finished just in time, but I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman exceeded his time. We must establish a discipline that if it is two minutes, that means two minutes or under, not two minutes, two and half minutes or three minutes. I am sorry, but we have to stick to those procedures.

Paul Maynard: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is so opposed to the idea of compensating Southern’s passengers, but he is right about one thing: the dispute is entirely resolvable. It is resolvable because the RMT

should recognise that the current mode of operation is safe and call off the strikes. ASLEF can also call off the strikes. We could then get on with improving the network.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I am pleased to hear the Minister say that no GTR staff will lose their jobs, but that is not the case for my constituents, some of whom have been sacked for being late. The balance of rights and responsibilities in our society is somewhat off if some people trying to improve their terms and conditions is costing other citizens their jobs.

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend is entirely right to point out the grossly disproportionate nature of this industrial action and that communities across the GTR network are experiencing a poorer quality of life because of this unwarranted industrial action.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): The overall situation for passengers—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The shadow Secretary of State must take some sort of soothing medicament, which will have the effect of calming him. He will be aware that I suggested to one of his north-east colleagues some time ago that it might be advisable to take up yoga, because it would have a therapeutic effect.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Or yogurt.

Mr Speaker: Or even yogurt.

Mrs Ellman: The overall situation for passengers, caused by a variety of reasons, is intolerable, yet GTR is receiving £1 billion a year in fees and the Department is exposed to £38 million of lost revenue. What can the Department do to resolve this situation?

Paul Maynard: Some months ago, as the hon. Lady will be aware, we asked Chris Gibb to look into the operation of the network, the infrastructure and the train operating company. We look forward to receiving his report by the end of the year, which will guide us in the decisions we take in the new year as to how to make rapid, noticeable, identifiable improvements in this network.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): The RMT members who are adding to the disruption for all our constituents are also the employees. May we be told how much they earn, how many of them have signed up to the new operating arrangements and quite what issue is preventing the RMT and the operators from reaching agreement and allowing other workers to get to work reliably? I am talking about how students and teachers can get to work, and how old people can visit their friends.

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend is right to point out why this is such a grossly disproportionate action the RMT is taking. More than 220 of the 223 staff involved have signed up to the new contracts to carry out the role of on-board supervisors, so they are striking against a role that they have already agreed to take up. That is both unreasonable and disproportionate.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Part of the problem is that every promise made from that Dispatch Box has not improved the service one iota in the past 18 months,

including today, a non-strike day, when the service from Brighton to London was a complete shambles. Will the Minister get to his feet to say he will do whatever it takes to improve this service?

Paul Maynard: I entirely recognise that the service today has been disappointing, because of a broken rail between East Croydon and Gatwick, but, as the hon. Gentleman points out, this is happening far too often on non-strike days. I expect both GTR and Network Rail to address these underlying performance issues, but they can do that only if they are not also faced with unwarranted, unjustifiable industrial action.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): My constituents who commute regularly look at the Southern rail situation with horror. What assurances can the Minister give them that such action by the unions could not spread to other areas, particularly given that we are renegotiating the South West Trains contract?

Paul Maynard: I recognise my right hon. Friend's concern. All I can say to her is that I expect all train operating companies across the country to do their utmost to ensure that they run a timely, efficient, reliable and punctual service. I hope that will be the case with whoever emerges from the franchise competition for South West Trains.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I have here analysis of the feedback from the 1,000 constituents who have been in touch with me about the performance of Southern rail, and it is a catalogue of misery. The failure of Southern rail is affecting my constituents' work, family life, health and wellbeing, and they have had enough. When will the Minister confirm rail devolution for London, so that Transport for London, which has a proven track record and high levels of customer satisfaction, can run these services? When will my constituents' Southern rail misery end?

Paul Maynard: I recognise the picture that the hon. Lady paints of the problems her constituents are facing. I hope she will join me in urging all sides in this dispute to return to the negotiating table and reach an agreement that puts the needs of passengers first, not the interests of the rail unions.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): I apologise for my interjection earlier, Mr Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) was absolutely right to say that the price for the RMT's self-indulgent, politically motivated strike action is being paid in jobs by people, particularly young people, who are trying to get to work. This action is neanderthal, its day has well gone and that strike must end. Will the Minister confirm that the train operating companies will be able to take greater control of the works of Network Rail in the future, so that we can solve some of the structural problems?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) for his great courtesy. May I gently tell him that I now realise why, 20 years ago, he was affectionately described to me by a very near constituency neighbour of his as "peppery".

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend has clearly been paying attention to the weekend press. I should perhaps observe that the Secretary of State will make a speech on this issue tomorrow evening. He may therefore wish to pay close attention to the following day's papers as well to learn more about what might be announced.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): I know that it suits some to blame all the current problems with this line on the rail unions, but let us be clear: my constituents have been putting up with a disgraceful and shabby service for the best part of two years now. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) asked about TfL, which has better satisfaction rates and provides better services. We want this company, GTR, to be stripped of the franchise and the franchise to be transferred to TfL as soon as possible. Will the Minister confirm whether the Government still intend to facilitate that? We do not want to wait until 2021: get on and do it now.

Paul Maynard: The hon. Gentleman is certainly right to identify the problems on the network, but they can be solved only if we are not facing industrial action on the network, day in, day out, which makes it impossible for those who wish to deal with Network Rail, GTR and other train operating companies to address the problems.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): Can the Minister clarify whether, in his view, the intolerable conditions for commuters in my constituency are caused more by a firm that has not been well run for some time, or by the unacceptable union practices, which have been rendered all the more disgraceful at Christmas time?

Paul Maynard: That is an important point. It was noticeable that the RMT adjusted its strike days because of the public outrage over the strikes that were occurring in the immediate run-up to Christmas. I urge it to go one step further and call off its strike altogether and get back round the negotiating table.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Coincidentally, I delivered a petition to No. 10 Downing Street this morning, calling for Southern to be sacked. Will the Minister acknowledge that it is not just the unacceptable and pointless union action that is causing chaos on the network, but repeated Network Rail equipment failure, repeated train failures, which are Southern's fault, and a shortage of drivers, which is Southern's fault. When will the Minister step in and take control away from the failing company, pass responsibility to Transport for London, which the Liberal Democrats called for as far back as 1999, and ensure that passengers are provided with much more generous compensation?

Paul Maynard: The right hon. Gentleman's analysis of the multiple causes is correct, but what he does not fully appreciate is that the need to focus on Network Rail as a source of many of the delays means that we must have full, rapid and ready access to the track day in, day out. We cannot do that against a backdrop of continual industrial action, which makes it harder to maintain the railways.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I have long campaigned for compensation, so may I thank the Minister for the welcome step towards it today? On the Horsham line,

we have a huge number of trains being cancelled or delayed as a result of failures with onboard cameras—cameras that seem to work well elsewhere. May I urge him to get GTR to get a grip on this? Either there is a technical fault, or some other issue is causing interference.

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend deserves particular credit for the assiduous nature of his campaign for improved compensation for Southern passengers. I am glad to hear that he welcomed last Friday's announcement. I understand that the level of faults on the driver-only operation trains to Horsham are running at almost double what is usually expected on the route. GTR is looking into the matter further. I am hoping to hear more from it in due course, and I will write to him with the outcome of that investigation.

Jim Dowd (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I started commuting—both regularly and frequently—from Forest Hill to London Bridge and Waterloo East in 1963. In all those 53 years, the service has never been as unreliable and as chaotic as it is today. I now no longer use Southern to go to London Bridge, as I use the overground service. Unfortunately, large parts of my constituency, and just about every other constituency of Members concerned about this matter, do not have that option. Many of my constituents blame the management for what is going on, and an equal number blame the unions. Another set blames Network Rail and the infrastructure. We have heard from the Minister today about track failures causing chaos on the Brighton line. When will he and the Government do something to reassure my constituents, and those of everybody in this Chamber, that the Government are actually trying to do the best they can for commuters, rather than leaving commuters to the fate of the most incompetent organisation in the entire UK rail industry?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has given new meaning to the description “delayed journey” and we are deeply grateful to him.

Paul Maynard: As Members will be aware, Chris Gibb is an experienced railwayman with a deep understanding of the industry and of that network. His report will look at all the issues that the hon. Gentleman has just raised. We look forward to receiving it and deciding the most appropriate action we can take to deliver the improvements that not only he but all of us in the Chamber are impatient to see.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Given that from tomorrow two of my towns, Seaford and Newhaven, will see their rail service cease to exist once again and instead have bus replacement services, and that from next week 14 of the stations in my constituency will see no rail service at all for nine days out of 14, the Government response is just not good enough. They need to intervene between the unions and Southern rail and get this sorted.

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend has never been anything less than assiduous in campaigning on behalf of Lewes, Seaford and Newhaven and their rail services, but the diminution in service to her constituency is due to an ASLEF threat of strike action against something that its members have been doing for many, many months—30%

of our commuter network is driver-controlled operation. ASLEF has been operating this system for many, many months on the new class 700s, yet its members are now striking against precisely what they have been doing. That, also, is disproportionate and unreasonable.

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab): Commuters in Croydon and elsewhere have suffered enough, and after two years of rail chaos they certainly should not be expected to pay any more for the services they use, so will the Minister now show that he recognises the extent of the failure and rule out any fare rises on Southern rail services next year?

Paul Maynard: We have been very clear that we are going to cap rail fare increases on regulated fares at retail prices index plus zero, but to recognise the impact on Southern passengers we announced last Friday a compensation package that equates to one month's free travel for annual season ticket holders. In addition, as I said earlier, we will be introducing Delay Repay 15 early on the GTR network from 11 December.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Our constituents in Sussex are at their wits' end. We are at our wits' end. Notwithstanding the chaos being caused by these completely unjustified strikes, last week's announcement on compensation was a good start, but only a start, and it was taken away with the other hand by the price rises that went with it. When can we have a proper, transparent penalty system where GTR pays penalties every time its trains are late, cancelled or delayed, and that is set against the price rises without the commuters having to go through a bureaucratic claim process? GTR needs to sort this out urgently.

Paul Maynard: I recognise my hon. Friend's concern to make sure that automatic compensation for Delay Repay is broadened as fast as it can be. We need to ensure that the system works, and works well. We need to ensure that passengers are on the trains that they say they were on that were delayed, so we need a technological solution. I am keen to improve the operation of Delay Repay 15 and GTR will be the first rail company that we try it out on.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Residents in Croydon have been suffering from the terrible service for many months now. Does the Minister agree that this is partly due to track and infrastructure failings, partly due to GTR's incompetence, and partly due to the intransigence of the RMT? Will he commit to spending money on fixing the points and signals and, if the RMT cannot be prevailed upon to call off this needless strike, will he consider legislating to ban such strike action on critical public infrastructure?

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend is right to identify the fact that the line will need investment, not just the £20 million that we have already put in, which will support the work of Chris Gibb, but the money to ensure that one of the most overburdened parts of our network is able to properly meet the needs of those who rely on it to get to work, to school and to all the other activities that life depends on in the south-east.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I, too, thank the Minister for the start in terms of compensation for all those who suffer this intolerable situation across the

network every day, including all those using the route across to Southampton airport, often travelling to Gatwick airport from Swanwick. Will the Minister confirm that he is looking at the broad-ranging harm caused by these disproportionate, political strikes, which are affecting regional airports as well as local businesses?

Paul Maynard: I always recognise the importance of Southampton Airport Parkway in the overall network, both for South West Trains and on the Southern network too. I am always happy to meet individual colleagues with particular concerns, and I will be more than happy to discuss Southampton airport's needs with my hon. Friend further.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I have the misfortune of having the misery line run through my constituency of Wealden. I welcome the Government's move to one-month compensation. It is now time for the unions to show similar boldness and call off the strikes. However, the timetable is not worth the paper it is written on. What more can the Minister do to get GTR management to get a grip and start running a service that does not require compensation from the Government because it is so appalling?

Paul Maynard: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's involvement over recent weeks; she has been a staunch advocate for the people of Uckfield, who indeed suffer from an inadequate railway line. The most important thing at this stage is for the unions to call off their industrial action and for both GTR and Network Rail to be allowed to focus on what really matters: ensuring that we have a reliable, timely and punctual railway network.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): Residents in Sutton want to get rid of this horrendous performance, which has been exacerbated by the unions, so that they can get back to merely poor performance and so that the underlying issues of rail, rolling stock and more drivers can start to be tackled. I welcome the compensation, but what about the passengers who pay-as-you-go using the Oyster card? What can they expect in return?

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend is right to point out that even in inner suburban London, people are equally reliant on Southern rail. They will also be eligible for season ticket reductions, should they have annual, quarterly or weekly tickets, as well as Delay Repay 15 compensation from 11 December. That, to me, underlines the importance of ensuring that the network functions well for everybody, wherever they live on the Southern network.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The Minister has rightly referred to a letter that I received from the director of rail safety, specifying that this form of technology is not only safe but has been properly tested by Southern as safe. Given that the unions continue to use safety as the cloak for this dispute, will the Minister consider using legislation to stop unions striking on grounds of safety when the industry regulator has deemed the relevant issue to be safe?

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend has done the country a great service during his time on the Transport Committee in trying to nail the myth that DOO is in some way an

[Paul Maynard]

unsafe means of driving trains. The language from the director of rail safety at the Office of Rail and Road was abundantly clear and it was examined closely at the most recent Transport Committee meeting. He could not have been clearer. It is now for ASLEF and the RMT to pay heed to his words and call off their unreasonable and disproportionate strikes.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): State-owned Network Rail is clearly not fit for purpose; the private sector train operating companies have weak and ineffectual management; and the rail unions are organising politically motivated strikes. If that were happening in local government, the Government would have sent in their own commissioners to sort out the organisation. Why do they not do so in this case?

Paul Maynard: My hon. Friend is right to point out the importance of getting track and train operators to align their incentives and work together to ensure that they deliver a better service for passengers. The Secretary of State has made no secret of the fact that he regards joint working and alliance working as being at the root of what will bring a better level of service on the Southern network.

We look forward to making further announcements on that in due course and to delivering the improved service that all passengers want, whatever political party they support and whatever their views on how the railways should be structured. They want a timely, reliable and punctual rail service. The RMT and ASLEF are in the way of that, with their disproportionate and unreasonable industrial action.

Children and Social Work Bill [Lords]

Second Reading

4.10 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr Nick Gibb): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am delighted to be able to open the debate in the absence of the Secretary of State, who is in Shanghai at the education summit. I know she regrets not being here, and she sends her apologies.

As the Secretary of State made clear when she spoke at the national children and adult services conference a few weeks ago, nothing is more important than making sure that children get the best start in life, feel safe, are well looked after and are able to fulfil their dreams. Nowhere is that more important than for those children who do not have the benefit of a loving family to help them on their way and to support them as they grow up, or who face other significant challenges, which make it harder for them to flourish and thrive.

Children's social care professionals perform some of society's most vital, most important work, and we entrust them with nothing less than keeping our children safe and making life-changing decisions about what is best for their futures. These are highly challenging, highly complex tasks, performed by deeply dedicated and committed individuals.

However, as we all know, the system in which these individuals work is far from perfect, meaning the help and support being offered to vulnerable children in different parts of the country is a long way from being consistently excellent. Evidence from Ofsted shows that most local authorities struggle in some way to provide consistently effective core social work practice. That is why this Government are determined to bring about the widest-reaching reforms to children's social care and social work for a generation.

Reviews by Professor Eileen Munro, Sir Martin Narey and Professor David Croisdale-Appleby, among others, have given us a deep understanding of the challenges faced by children's social care. They have described a system in which initial social worker training is not consistently preparing students for the challenges of the job, and those already doing it too often lack the time, specialist skill and supervision needed to achieve real change for children and families; a system that focuses too much on management and is governed by prescribed approaches rather than excellent practice; and a system where services have not always been designed around vulnerable children, and innovation has not been given enough space to thrive.

Over the last six years, the Government have taken important steps towards addressing these challenges. For example, we have raised standards in children's homes and enabled young people in foster care to remain with their carer up to the age of 21. We have invested £100 million through our innovation programme to allow radical new approaches to children's social care to be developed and tested. In April, we announced a £200 million extension to the programme to take this further still. We have taken a variety of steps to enhance the status, skills and capacity of the social work profession—both for children and for adults. Those include appointing chief social workers; publishing definitive statements of the knowledge and skills required by

adults' and children's social workers; and investing over £750 million since 2010 in traditional and fast-track routes into the profession.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Gibb: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I would just like to explain some of the tenets of the Bill, and then I will take his intervention.

We are starting to see things change. This year, we have seen the first “outstanding” judgments under the most recent—and most challenging—Ofsted framework. Local authorities are testing innovative ways of supporting families through the children's social care innovation programme. Examples of excellent leadership across the country are being celebrated by Ofsted and others.

However, we are under no illusion that there is still much more to be done. That is why, in July of this year, the Department for Education published a clear and ambitious vision and plan for the changes that need to be made to drive sustainable improvement across the whole country. This is our plan for putting children first. It sets out fundamental reforms across each of the three pillars on which the social care system stands: people and leadership, practice and systems, and governance and accountability. This Bill is a crucial part of delivering reforms across those three pillars.

Part 1 concerns children who are in care or supported by the state. Clause 1 sets out, for the first time, a set of corporate parenting principles designed to establish consistently high standards in the support of looked-after children and care leavers, and drive a culture of excellent corporate parenting. The principles are intended to help a local authority to think and act in the interests of the children in their care in the same way as any good parent would. This is not about putting a new set of duties on local authorities; it is about changing behaviour and practice. The aim is to ensure that all parts and every tier of local government have the needs and circumstances of looked-after children and care leavers in their minds in their planning and decisions. This responsibility goes beyond just children's social care, reaching across the whole of the local authority.

Clause 2 will ensure that the corporate parenting ethos extends into adulthood and that all care leavers are clear about the support on offer to them and how to access it. Care leavers will have access to information about the services available to them through a local offer from their local authority, with each local offer based on consultation with care leavers themselves.

Clause 3 will give all care leavers access to support from a personal adviser at any point up to the age of 25. We amended the Bill in another place to make sure that the service is offered at least annually so that care leavers can take advantage of it whenever they need to.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Gibb: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, may I make a little more progress, and then I will come back to him?

The next section of the Bill recognises that children who are adopted or who leave care under another permanence order often have ongoing difficulties resulting from their early life experiences. Clauses 4 to 7 will therefore give them access to the same support that looked-after children receive from virtual school heads at local authority level, and that designated teachers provide in schools to help with their education. Following an undertaking given in the other place, we are bringing forward amendments that will extend these provisions to children who have been adopted from overseas.

Clauses 8 and 9 expand the factors that courts and local authorities must take into account when deciding on the most appropriate place for a child. They do not give priority to one type of placement over another, but they do place more emphasis on stability and what would be in a child's best long-term interests, taking account of the impact of any harm that the child may have suffered.

Jonathan Reynolds *rose*—

Mr Gibb: I now give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Jonathan Reynolds: I am extremely grateful to the Minister. I was trying to tell him that I have to speak in a Delegated Legislation Committee at half-past 4, so the clock was ticking down for me. I want to ask him about a specific point relating to some casework that I have done in my constituency. It is about the lack of safeguarding checks for 16 and 17-year-olds in private fostering arrangements. I had a situation where a young person within that age group in my constituency went into a private fostering arrangement, and the parents were unable to get the assurances they would have had in a public setting. That is not addressed in the Bill, and I wonder whether the Minister would be willing to look at it if I tabled an amendment at a later stage.

Mr Gibb: Yes, of course. My hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families is very keen to engage in debate on the details in Committee. I know that he will be very interested in the particular case raised by the hon. Gentleman and want to debate it with him.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): In Oxfordshire we have had a situation where children in care have been abused, and that has led to Operation Bullfinch. How will what the Minister has set out make that situation better?

Mr Gibb: The local safeguarding arrangements set out in the Bill will provide a strong statutory framework that puts responsibility on the police, the NHS—through the clinical commissioning group—and the local authority to ensure that a robust safeguarding system is in place, but with greater local flexibility than we have at the moment, so that the arrangements are as effective as possible in meeting local needs. I also believe that the combination of improved national arrangements for analysing serious cases, which I will come on to, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, and for learning from them in a more systematic way, including higher standards for social workers, as set out in the Bill, will enable Oxfordshire and other counties across the country to keep children safer than is currently the case.

[Mr Gibb]

Chapter 2 of part 1 of the Bill focuses largely on arrangements for the safeguarding and protection of children. Earlier this year, Alan Wood, the former director of children's services in Hackney who is president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, carried out a review for the Government on the role and functions of local safeguarding children boards. His report, which was published in May, found that local arrangements were patchy. Less than half of LSCBs were judged by Ofsted to be good or better, and he reported that there was a clear consensus in favour of reform. Strong partnership is, as we know from serious case reviews, key to keeping children safe.

Clauses 12 to 15 will establish a new child safeguarding practice review panel to review serious child safeguarding cases that are complex or of national importance. The purpose of the panel will be to improve the way in which we learn from cases where a child has died or been seriously harmed and neglect or abuse of the child was known or suspected.

Clauses 16 to 30 will introduce a stronger statutory framework for child safeguarding and protection at local level. The focus will shift away from wide-ranging local partnerships and will place a duty on the three key agencies involved in safeguarding children—namely local authorities, the police and the health service—to work together, and with any relevant agencies, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Tim Loughton *rose*—

Mr Gibb: I will give way to my hon. Friend and am sorry that I did not do so earlier.

Tim Loughton: The Minister will be aware that this is not the original Bill, thanks to the good work of the House of Lords in removing clauses 29 to 33 on the duty to innovate. At the recent national children and adult services conference in Manchester, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said of that duty:

“It's about how we can put you in the best position to protect those children properly.”

The trouble is that the “you”—meaning 150 organisations, including Coram, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the British Association of Social Workers and 90% of all social workers—said that they did not want it and that they were opposed to it. Will the Minister confirm that he will not try to reintroduce those clauses in this House?

Mr Gibb: I listened carefully to my hon. Friend, who will be aware, of course, that Eileen Munro, whom he appointed to look into this whole area when he was the Minister, supported the power to innovate. The Local Government Association, ADCS and Catch22 also support it. The power is not to do with taking rights away from children or with saving money; it is about giving councils the opportunity to develop new ways of working that they believe will improve outcomes for children.

Tim Loughton: My hon. Friend says that it is not about taking rights away from children, but one of the scenarios is the abolition of independent reviewing officers, who absolutely can be the only voice independently

standing up for vulnerable looked-after children in local authorities. If they go under the proposals, how is that not taking away the rights of children, particularly vulnerable children?

Mr Gibb: This is not about abolishing any statutory responsibilities. My hon. Friend should wait to see the amendments tabled in Committee. I am sure that he will want to talk about his concerns in more detail with the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families, who will take them very seriously indeed, particularly given my hon. Friend's background and experience.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Chapter 2 covers other provisions relating to children, so we are talking about the rights of the child. Will the Minister consider amending the law so that a child has the right to have the names of both parents on their marriage registration certificate?

Mr Gibb: I know that that issue has been discussed and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families will listen very carefully to my right hon. Friend if she tables such an amendment.

We are not introducing change for the sake of change. If existing LSCB arrangements are working, there will be nothing to prevent them from continuing in a similar vein within the new legal framework set out in the Bill. Importantly, the local safeguarding partners will have a clear responsibility for the arrangements and the flexibility to change and improve them if they are not working.

I should briefly mention two other provisions in chapter 2 of the Bill. Clause 11 is largely technical and allows the Government to use their powers to intervene in combined authorities where their services are failing vulnerable children and young people, in the same way as the Government can intervene in individual authorities. Clause 31 was an amendment to the Bill, and it will enable the Secretary of State to extend whistleblower protection to people applying for jobs in children's social care, as well as to existing employees.

Part 2 sets the legal framework for the establishment of a bespoke regulator for all social workers in England. High-quality social work can transform lives, and social workers play a critical role in our society. Every day, social workers deal with complex and fraught situations that require a great depth of skill, knowledge, understanding and empathy. However, when social workers are not able to fulfil their role competently, the consequences can be grave. In order to protect the public from these risks, social workers have to meet high standards of acceptable practice and competence, which are overseen by a regulator.

The need for an improved system of regulation for the social work profession was highlighted in recent independent reviews by Sir Martin Narey and Professor David Croisdale-Appleby. Our ambition, through the establishment of a new bespoke regulator for social work, is to continue to improve the practice of social work and raise the status of the profession. For too long, the bar on standards has been too low. Some graduates are leaving courses and being registered as social workers without the knowledge and skills required to do the job, and that cannot be right. The new regulator will ensure, following consultation with the profession, that minimum standards are set at the right level. The new regulator will be a separate legal entity, operating independently

of Ministers in its day-to-day work. The Government have always been clear that we have no intention of making decisions about the performance of individual social workers. As with other independent health and social care regulators, the Professional Standards Authority will oversee the operations of Social Work England. The PSA has welcomed the revised clauses.

We are planning to table a further amendment regarding the national assessment and accreditation system. That will introduce a nationally recognised post-qualification specialism in child and family social work, which will reinforce the focus on quality of practice.

There are two other crucial measures that are not in the Bill, but about which amendments will be tabled shortly. First, amendments will be tabled to ensure that looked-after children in England and Wales can legally be accommodated in secure children's homes in Scotland. Recent case law has cast some doubt on the present arrangements. Secondly, amendments will be tabled regarding the power to innovate. That power is a direct response to the issues raised by Eileen Munro in her independent review of child protection. She has said:

"Trusting professionals to use their judgement rather than be forced to follow unnecessary legal rules will help ensure children get the help they need, when they need it. Testing innovation in a controlled way to establish the consequences of the change, before any national roll out, is a sensible and proportionate way forward."

The purpose of the power is to allow individual local authorities to test new ways of working by changing or disapplying specific legislative provisions within a controlled environment, with a view to achieving better outcomes for children. As hon. Members know, the other place was unhappy about the clauses that were included in the Bill at introduction. We appreciate that this is a new way of working in Government and we understand why some noble Lords were wary, but the provisions are too important just to let them drop. I emphasise that this is a grassroots power, empowering local authorities to test new and better ways of working in the best interests of children.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Gibb: If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I am coming to the concluding elements of my comments.

Local government overwhelmingly supports these measures, and the national associations and individual authorities have made it clear that they do not want us to lose this opportunity to allow them to test new ways of working. We have, therefore, reviewed and substantially revised the clauses to make sure that they avoid the issues raised in the other place, and there are several notable new features. We have removed the provision that allowed a body carrying local authority functions under an intervention arrangement to apply to use the power. Only local authorities can apply to use the power and if they do not wish to, that is the end of the matter. The power was never intended to be used to alter or remove children's fundamental rights or entitlements. Its sole purpose is to allow local authorities to trial better and more practical alternatives to the sometimes very specific and overly prescriptive requirements set out in legislation in order to provide better outcomes for children. The new amendments will put that beyond doubt.

We will set out further provision for the process surrounding the power to ensure that it is based on sound consultation, transparency and robust safeguards. All applications to use the power will be subject to local consultation, scrutiny by an independent panel and parliamentary approval. Pilots will be closely monitored. Those changes will be in addition to amendments the Government tabled in the other place about the scrutiny process that accompanies the power—

Mr Lammy: On that point, will the Minister give way?

Mr Gibb: I will not give way to the right hon. Gentleman because he was not here at the beginning of my speech, when I set out a lot of the basic principles surrounding the Bill.

As I said, those changes will be in addition to amendments the Government tabled in the other place about the scrutiny process that accompanies the power and ruling out the use of the provision for profit. The Government are committed to working with the sector. The changes we have made are the result of significant consultation and we believe that these clauses are the safest possible way to test new approaches. My hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families is very keen to meet any colleagues who have concerns to discuss these provisions further.

This is a Bill for the welfare and prospects of vulnerable children and young people. All its measures are designed to improve the services that so many of them rely on, and I commend it to the House.

4.31 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): We welcome any attempt to improve the lives of children in care, and I am sure that aim is shared in all parts of the House. The challenges facing those children are significant, as is the effort needed to tackle them. The National Audit Office said recently:

"Nationally the quality of help and protection for children is unsatisfactory and inconsistent, suggesting systemic rather than just local failure."

The Government need to take action in the Bill to address that failure, rather than make it worse. I hope that the Secretary of State is listening to this very important debate, even if she is not able to attend the Chamber.

A new report by LaingBuisson for the Department for Education, which was published only last Friday, considered the options of outsourcing and developing markets in children's social services. That is privatisation by another name. Quite simply, it would be not just the wrong solution, but no solution at all.

Following the excellent work of my noble Friends and others in the other place, the clauses that would have allowed local authorities to derogate from their existing legal obligations are no longer in the Bill. However, given the seriousness of the proposals and the timing of that report, I must ask the Secretary of State's Department to think again and guarantee to this House that the Government will not seek to use the Bill as a vehicle to privatise children's social services.

I hope the Minister can give us that assurance later, because there is a good deal to welcome in the Bill. From the principles of corporate parenting to the local offer for care leavers, there are steps towards helping young people in care and leaving care that we welcome.

[Angela Rayner]

I do not want to have to divide the House in later stages and the Opposition would like to make progress collectively.

This issue is vital to the collective good of our nations. The services that are provided and the great work that is done on the ground by many public sector workers should be applauded, as they change lives every single day. I must declare an interest as my niece is one such worker. Our aim collectively within the Bill should be to enhance and enable that important work. Privatisation and fragmentation are not the answer. Our overall concern is less with what is in the Bill than with what is not in it. In short, the Bill lacks the ambition to have the meaningful impact on the lives of vulnerable young people that is needed.

If we are to make significant progress, we have to improve child mental health services. The Bill focuses on adoption, which is hardly a surprise—in the past several years, the Government have taken several steps to make it easier to adopt, such as the Education and Adoption Act 2016—and we welcome measures that support adoption, but surely the Minister is aware that only one in every 20 children in care goes on to be adopted, so can he explain to the House why the Bill, much like the last one, focuses exclusively on adoption and does not contain provision for other forms of care? Would this not have been an opportunity to come forward with a comprehensive strategy for children in all forms of care? Will he indicate whether we might anticipate further legislation or whether he thinks that no changes are needed?

Similarly, we welcome the principles of corporate parenting, but there are questions about why the Bill does not go further. I am sure the Minister agrees that children in care will often have complex needs that require a joined-up approach across public services in order to get the best possible outcomes, so will he explain why there is no provision in the Bill to facilitate ways for public services, such as health and education, to play a key role in ensuring good corporate parenting? These public services play a key role in ensuring the best outcomes for children in care, yet there is no apparent involvement for them in the corporate parenting principles.

The principle of the local offer is welcome, and we supported it when it was introduced for children with special educational needs and disabilities in the Children and Families Act 2014, but we have since seen failings in practice, with the quality of local offers varying wildly between local authorities, no minimum guarantees of quality, no statutory guidance and no certainty that the local offer will be available to all those who need it. When there are no minimum guarantees of quality, we know which areas will lose out. Overwhelmingly, it will be areas already facing disadvantage that will not get the support they need.

There are already unacceptable variations in spending on children's services between regions. In one local authority, £4,970 is spent on children in need; in another, it is only £340. The Department for Education's own figures show that these spending inequalities fall along our all-too-familiar geographical divides.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): In my conversations with Hull City Council's children's services department, it talks to me about the resource

inequalities it faces and the very disadvantaged community it serves. It is not asking for powers to innovate; it is asking for proper resources to provide the services that young people need in the city.

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend makes a significant point. Local authorities in the north-west, such as mine, have faced cuts of 50% since austerity while trying to deal with the complex needs of their communities. I ask the Government to look again at that.

In the south-east, spending tends to be much higher than average, but, as we move through to the midlands and the north-west, spending in local authorities is far lower. Once again, levels of spending on public services fall on either side of the north-south divide, with the north losing out. In his final report as Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw has singled out the north-south divide as one of the great challenges facing our education system and our country, and only this morning the Children's Commissioner said that the problem was simply that parents in the north were not as ambitious as those in the south. I am sure that the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families, a parent from the north himself, will agree that such comments are neither acceptable nor helpful. In an effort to ensure that all regions of our country, north and south, benefit from the local offer, I hope he will seek to put clear national standards in the Bill that all local offers will have to meet. There is a clear case for proper guidance on what the local offer should contain and how to make it accessible to all those who need it, drawing on the best available practice. Will the Minister tell us why these issues have not been addressed in the Bill, and whether the Government will bring forward amendments during its passage?

Part 2 establishes the new regulator, Social Work England. I want to pay tribute once again to the excellent work done by the parties in the other place. Following their scrutiny, plans to place regulatory control with the Secretary of State were defeated. I am sure that the Minister would acknowledge the norm that regulators are operationally independent from Government and, in this case, serve the interests of children. Will he guarantee today that that independence will be respected as the Bill is ultimately agreed?

While we welcome the new regulatory body, assuming that it is effective and independent, we will seek answers to a number of questions about how it will function. After all, the Government seem to want Social Work England to have a representative improvement and regulatory roles within the profession, yet they have not told us how it will be achieved. We have no detail on the remit of the work of the new regulator. As it stands, we will find out only through a series of regulations to be made by the Secretary of State. Will the Minister tell us exactly what the remit and powers of the new regulator will be, and why it is appropriate for those to be decided in secondary legislation, away from scrutiny of the full House? After all, we have been down this path before. Only four years ago, the General Social Care Council was closed. What, then, will be done differently this time to ensure that we do not look back in a year or two and see yet another regulator that has been closed down?

We broadly welcome what is in the Bill, although we hope that the Minister will answer some of the many questions that remain. Once already in the other place, the Government's plans for the outsourcing and

privatisation of our children's services, dressed up as "innovation", were defeated. Nobody in the profession believes that privatisation is the answer to the immense challenges it currently faces, and neither can it alleviate the growing demand for children's services.

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend is doing a very good job of putting forward the case that exists in the country. Is she concerned that the Minister has not said much at all about what "innovation" he expects would require a local authority, in effect, to wash its hands of its statutory duty in respect of our young people and children?

Angela Rayner: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Most people who work in the profession believe that privatisation is absolutely the wrong answer and will not help with any form of innovation that the Government might currently want. In fact, the best way of helping would be to restore the investment in our community and local services that the Government have cut over the last few years.

I call on the Minister to confirm today that the Government will not seek to bring these clauses back into the Bill. I am sure that he knows as well as Opposition Members and indeed all Members that these plans do not offer a real solution. If the Minister fails to take that suggestion on board, Opposition Members will be far less conciliatory when we debate the Bill again.

4.43 pm

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): The Bill is a very good one. It has been amended in the House of Lords, and we will need to consider the implications of that in due course. The central points of the Bill are well founded. I am particularly impressed with the theme of reflecting the work of the Munro report and improving the capacity of social workers to use their own judgment, rather than simply rely on box ticking. That is an appropriate theme for the Bill and it explains why the regulatory structure introduced by the Bill will help. It is through such a regulatory system that the ability to make judgments will be made easier.

It is important for social workers to have a clear eye on what professional regulation is all about. The profession should be operating, of course, at arm's length, which is usefully stressed in the Bill. A register of social workers makes a lot of sense, because one of the things that we must do is enhance professionalism in social work. That is where I have some difference with the Government, in that I think that ultimately we should have a professional body for social workers. The Education Select Committee made it clear in a recent report that it thought there was a strong case for such a body, and I think there is an appetite for that beyond the Chamber. I urge the Government to have an open mind, and I suggest that they continue to send signals that they would like a professional body to be established. I also think that an independent review of proceedings in five years' time makes a huge amount of sense, because that is a realistic timescale.

There is, however, one area in which I think the Bill needs some additions, or at least some recognitions. Given that more than 70,000 children are effectively children of the state and that so many more children are subjected to sexual abuse, and given the historical sexual

abuse that has taken place, our failure to place the issue of sex and relationships education front and centre is becoming increasingly obvious. The Government must embark on a full consultation to provide reassurance that something will be done about this most important matter. I ask the Minister to confirm that there will be a realistic and meaningful consultation on the introduction of statutory SRE.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has raised that point. May I ask him to back Labour amendments to make SRE part of the safeguarding of all children, so that we can finally ensure that we keep every young person in the country safe?

Neil Carmichael: To an extent, that will depend on what the amendments are, and whether the Government make it clear that they will organise a full consultation. However, I note what the hon. Lady has said, and I am sure that the Government have noted what I have just said. We need a full, meaningful and comprehensive consultation on this important matter.

Five Select Committee Chairs sent a letter to the Secretary of State. Obviously, I organised one of them. The others came from the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee—Members may well ask what it has to do with SRE, and I can explain if they wish me to—the Women and Equalities Committee, the Health Committee, and the Home Affairs Committee. All those Committees effectively said precisely the same thing: we need SRE to be introduced statutorily in our schools.

Finally, I want to say something about latitude for local government. The Select Committee did some work relating to children in care, particularly those with mental health difficulties. When we went to Trafford, it was strikingly obvious to us that through co-operation with other agencies, coterminous structures and strong leadership, the council was delivering outstanding results. Its ability to benefit from strategic leadership at the top end, operational leadership within the structures themselves, and a coterminous relationship not only with its own organisations and related agencies but with the police force was clearly extraordinarily beneficial for working practices and the way in which decisions were made and responses given on issues connected with children in care and children at risk. Therefore, the Government are right to move towards giving local government more latitude in the way it formulates its structures to deliver outcomes.

In short, there is a lot to be said for the Bill. It is critical that we acknowledge that some form of professional body will be good for social workers and social work generally. The absence of SRE is a pity. It is important, however, that the Government give the firm commitment I have asked for. Generally speaking, the Government are going in the right direction on local government.

4.50 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am aware that very few clauses in the Bill affect Scotland but, as a member of the Education Committee, I may have some points of interest and I might be able to help the Bill to become even better.

[Marion Fellows]

When a child or young person cannot live at home, we all owe it to them to make the process of finding a new, stable family as efficient and straightforward as possible. Clause 1 would introduce seven “corporate parenting principles” that local authorities must “have regard to”. I ask the Minister: why are those not mandatory? The Joint Committee on Human Rights has said:

“We have considered the arguments and the evidence for and against introducing a statutory duty on public authorities in England requiring them to have due regard to the rights of children in the UNCRC in the exercise of their functions relating to children, equivalent to the duties already introduced in Wales and Scotland.”

If Wales and Scotland can have such a duty, I find it difficult to understand why it will not be mandatory in England. The Joint Committee went on to recommend that Parliament takes the opportunity presented by the Bill to ensure that there is “such a duty”.

It is important that children are the focus of and are at the heart of any Bill that is introduced in this Parliament. We need to look at how children are affected by legislation introduced by not just the Department for Education, but Departments across the board.

In Scotland, the First Minister has said that people who have experienced the care system will be the driving force of an independent review of how Scotland treats its looked-after children. That is the mandatory duty in action. In Scotland, we want to move forward and to listen to young people, and we are looking at extending what is happening in Scotland to people who have been in care and are going through the process of becoming adults who stand on their own. It is good that the Bill looks at what happens to children after they leave care, but I ask the Minister to examine what we do in Scotland, because we are moving forward at a far faster pace than England and Wales.

A former children’s Minister in Scotland has said:

“children don’t need a system that just stops things happening to them”.

We have safeguards, but we also need a system that “makes things happen for them. A system that supports them to become the people they can be”,

fostering a sense “of belonging”. I am sure that the Minister agrees with that and with the fact that that should be a guiding principle for any legislation. What steps will the Government take to respond to the recommendations made earlier this year by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child? When do they plan to publish their official response? What further steps will the Government take to ensure that policy development across Whitehall has children’s rights at its heart?

Clause 31, which is the one measure in the Bill that affects Scotland, relates to whistleblowing. The Scottish Government acknowledge and respect the need for whistleblowing. They believe that procedures should be in place across the public and private sectors to support staff in raising any concerns to ensure that people can work in a safe and secure environment. They believe that it is important that NHS workers in Scotland should be able to raise any concerns about patient safety or malpractice, because that helps to improve our health service. That should be the case not only in the health service, but across all professions, especially in the social

work sector, given the importance of child protection. We welcome this measure and are really keen for the Government to see it through.

Social work is regulated in Scotland, and I again ask the Minister to look at how the Scottish system works. When the Education Committee heard evidence from social workers and their representatives as part of the inquiry referred to by its Chair, the hon. Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), one of the first things they said was that we should look at the Scottish system. I encourage Ministers to do that. The Scottish Social Services Council regulates the profession and all social workers in Scotland have to belong to it. I am pleased that England will be moving forward in a similar way.

I share the apprehensions expressed by the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) about creeping privatisation in the care sector, especially in relation to children. It is imperative that children should be looked after when they cannot be with their own parents and families, and the duty to protect children is shared by us all in society, not just by professionals. This is another reason why whistleblowers can be important.

The Bill will improve the situation in England, but it has to be seen in the context of child poverty. The Institute for Fiscal Studies states that child poverty in the UK is projected to rise by 8 percentage points by 2020, which makes it even more important that these provisions are right. Many more children could be drawn into the care system as a result of the ongoing austerity programme across the UK, so will the Minister please look at what we are doing in Scotland? We might not be perfect, and we might not get everything right, but we put children and their experiences at the heart of our system and we listen to them. I ask him please to look to the north, as well as to Wales, which is also doing really good work on child protection and childcare across the board.

4.57 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I draw the House’s attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

I welcome most parts of the Bill, and I particularly welcome the fact that it is now without certain parts, as I said earlier. It is good to have this opportunity to discuss child protection and social workers. We spend far too little time in the House highlighting the excellent practices that we expect our social workers to achieve in highly adverse conditions. I have always referred to social workers as our fourth emergency service, and I am proud to be a patron of the Social Worker of the Year awards, along with the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck). I attended the awards dinner just over a week ago, at which fantastic examples of dedication, hard work, skill and expertise were on display. Alas, none of that made it into the mainstream media, as is so often the case.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the challenges facing social workers are particularly intense as a result not only of immense reductions in funding, but of the fast-changing climate and the Government’s occasional initiative-itis that seems to attach itself to the social work sector?

Tim Loughton: Social workers are certainly under a huge amount of pressure, but that initiative-itis has, to an extent, gone into reverse, not least through the shrinking in the past six years of the “working together” rule book—the bible of social workers and social work practice—which amounted to more than 750 pages when this Government came into office. Social workers were spending all their time checking what the rulebook said, looking over their shoulders and ticking boxes, rather than being allowed to get on with the business of being social workers, and eyeballing families and the vulnerable children whom they are there to protect and work with. With the support of Professor Munro, that work was an important initiative that tried to take away many of the administrative burdens on social workers, notwithstanding their other pressures and challenges.

I am proud of the work that the Conservative party has done in this area, starting with the commission on social work that I chaired back in 2007. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) is in the Chamber because she played an important role in the commission. We produced the document “No More Blame Game—The Future for Children’s Social Workers”, which is as relevant today as it was then. The trouble is that social workers are still too often subject to the blame game, especially in the tabloid press, from which it would appear that it is social workers who abuse and murder vulnerable young children. Of course they do not; they are there to try to protect such children. Parents, carers and others commit those foul acts, but people would not believe that based on the reports. Too many people view our social workers with disdain.

From that piece of work, of which I am proud, came the suggestions for consultant social workers and a chief social worker. In 2010, our manifesto commitment was to take child protection back to the frontline. I am also pleased and proud that the first review initiated by the Department for Education after the 2010 election was not about schools or education matters; it was the excellent Munro review into child protection. I was slightly surprised that the Minister prayed in aid Professor Munro so explicitly. I appointed Professor Munro and worked closely with her, but the problem is that many of her 15 pertinent recommendations are still to be implemented, and they do not involve the removal of a local authority’s basic duty to protect vulnerable young children.

I support the Bill as it stands, but it could certainly be improved by a number of enhancing amendments, although I would not include among those any that would rehash clauses 29 to 33. I was alarmed by the Minister’s comments that strongly suggested that those clauses will be revisited. That would be a shame because, after the good work done in the Lords, we were promised a period of reflection—perhaps it could be referred to as a pause, as we have had for other legislation—but that reflection will not have lasted long if the Government return with amendments. I caution them to extend the period of reflection before they hurry into repeating what was clearly a mistake. A clear majority in the House of Lords and a great majority of important organisations involved in child protection were not in favour of the proposed changes and made their feelings clear.

Let us be clear, many good things have happened around child protection under this Government. The reform of fostering and adoption regulations has helped

not only fosterers and adopters, but, most importantly, children who are being fostered. It has also helped more children to get adopted. There is more to be done, but a lot of progress has been made over the past six years. Ofsted’s inspection system is now much more appropriate and rigorous.

The Munro review gave rise to a lot of innovation in child protection. The child sexual exploitation action plan was published back in November 2011—well before the Savile scandal became so public and made CSE a headline issue of which we have never seen the like. We have the Staying Put policy which, although perhaps underfunded and less effective in certain local authorities, includes the right to a personal adviser until the age of 25 and places a duty on local authorities to stay in touch.

These are all good things being innovated through the Bill that, along with staying close until the age of 21, offer support to vulnerable children in the care system at what is often a most fragile time in their lives. Previously, at the age of 18 or even 16 they faced a cliff edge, coming out of care into the big wide world without the help and support—the safety net—that so many of these children and young people need.

Catherine West: The hon. Gentleman is being extremely generous in giving way a second time. Does he agree that much of this could be quite academic if funding does not accompany these exciting developments?

Tim Loughton: Funding is, of course, part of this, but we can do a lot better with existing funds, although the National Audit Office report showed that funding on vulnerable children had gone up as well. But what was not working properly is when social workers were spending, through the integrated children’s system and other very bureaucratic systems, up to 80% of their time in front of a computer filling in forms to do with child protection, rather than getting out there and dealing with children face to face. That was a huge waste of resources, but more importantly a huge waste of opportunities to deal more effectively and early on with children, who really did need to have the support, and often intervention, of professional services and social workers in particular.

Despite all these innovations, we still need to do an awful lot better for vulnerable children, children in the care system and our care leavers. It is a fact that 40%—almost half—of our care leavers aged 19 to 21 are classed as not in education, employment or training, and 4% of them are in custody. Two thirds of children in the care system have special educational needs, almost half of them with a diagnosable mental disorder. The percentage for the educational achievement of children achieving A* to C GCSEs is still in its teens, compared with its peer population now with over 60% achieving those grades.

I particularly welcome some of the Bill’s corporate parenting principles—although it will be interesting to see how they work in practice—that apply to physical and mental health, which is so important. Although this Government have again done a lot to raise the profile of mental health, particularly among children and young people, and have injected a further £1.4 billion into that area, the problem is that not nearly enough of it—and that is not enough in itself—is getting through to the frontline, to help the children and young people who so desperately need it, when they need it and where they need it.

[Tim Loughton]

These are challenging times. The NAO report on children in need of protection, to which various hon. Members have already referred, flagged up some worrying observations. Too often the way we look after vulnerable children is a postcode lottery. We are still very poor at sharing best practice in this country, yet a child in need, a child in care and a child in desperate need of protection should be dealt with no differently whether they are in Durham, Worthing, Exeter or anywhere else throughout the United Kingdom.

There was a surge following the horrific case of Baby Peter, but the number of children coming into the care system continues to rise: there are now in excess of 70,000 children in the care system in England—the highest since 1985, when the environment in respect of why children tended to come into the care system was very different. I do not know whether we need to take more children into care, or fewer, but I do know that we need to take the right children into care at the right time, and give them the right support and services if they cannot be supported living with their families or other kinship carers.

Another thing I am very proud of is the Government's initiative on promoting adoption, which had fallen into neglect, frankly, after the good work done in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The adoption figures have started to fall back considerably and there is still a very big grey space following the Munby judgment. But that should not have happened, because those adoption reforms were about bringing forward an easier system for adopters to offer their services and for children to go through all the hoops. There were too many hoops and it took too long for children to get adopted. We needed to bring onside not only those involved in adoption at the local authority level, which largely we did, but, contemporaneously and in sympathy, those in the legal profession, as many judges felt put upon, in that they were being told how to run cases in their courts. I am afraid that the Government have failed to do that and should not therefore be surprised by the disappointing reversal in the adoption figures, which I hope will be reversed again, because adoption does offer the best chance at a second childhood—a second possibility of being brought up in a safe and loving family—for a lot of children who still do not get that chance and are still in the care system.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that although many younger children are being adopted, it is far more difficult to place older children? We need to do more to promote the benefits to those children of adoption at a later age.

Tim Loughton: The hon. Lady is right about that, but shiny, squeaky new babies have always been much more attractive to people who want to adopt than problematic teenagers who have been through all the trials and tribulations of broken families—perhaps abuse, neglect, mental health problems and behavioural disorders—and have been pushed from pillar to post in the care system. Those are the children we have most let down, which is one reason why the introduction of adoption scorecards was based not just on improving the number of children adopted, but on concentrating on those harder-to-adopt children: older children; large sibling groups; and children from black and minority ethnic communities. Too often

these children were at the back of the adoption queue. I am glad to say that in recent years disproportionately they have found themselves more likely to get adopted than they were before. This is still not enough and there remains a lot to be done, but that was absolutely the right focus to bring in over the past few years.

Another thing I am concerned about is that despite all the good work the Government did on paralleling the *kraamzorg* system for health visitors in Holland, we have lost 722 health visitors since January and there has been a 13% decrease in the number of school nurses since 2010. They are really important people in early intervention—in identifying children with problems, and those for whom the support of social services and other caring services is essential, sooner rather than later.

Of course, I am also worried by the recent rise, again, in social worker vacancy rates in many authorities around the country, and too often the positions are taken by temporary social workers. Social work, particularly when dealing with child protection, is an area where staff need to forge empathetic relationships with those vulnerable children and families whom they are there to look after. Being pushed from pillar to post, from one home to another, from one social worker to another reviewing officer—or whoever it may be—only accentuates the instability and vulnerability of those children.

I worry when, even in this place, we are still too quick to point the finger of blame at the social workers because a child has been brutally assaulted or killed, as still happens in too many cases, by their carer, parent or close relative. We hear the talk of “wilful neglect”. There are social workers who are not doing their job properly, and there are social workers who are not up to the job and should not be in social work, and they should be removed from it, but they are a small minority. We should not make the rest of our excellent, hard-working, dedicated social worker force feel constantly that they are the ones to blame for many of these tragedies. We have to up everybody's game, but they are part of the solution; in the vast majority of cases, they are not part of the problem.

It is odd therefore that at the heart of the original Bill, since eviscerated of clauses 29 to 33, which it would seem are about to make an unfortunate reappearance, were radical new proposals supposedly to test new ways of working, under the guise of promoting innovation. As I said earlier, the clauses were not remotely welcomed by the vast majority of people who are involved in the whole field of child protection. They were opposed by the British Association of Social Workers, the Care Leavers Association, the Children's Rights Alliance for England, CoramBAAF, which is the Government's appointed adoption provider, the Fostering Network, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and Action for Children. In various polls, about 90% of working social workers did not support those clauses either, which was hardly surprising given that the clauses came out of the blue. There was no consultation on absolutely fundamental changes to the way in which we apply duties of care to vulnerable children in this country.

I pay tribute to the House of Lords, particularly to Lord Ramsbotham, for putting forward the amendments that saw those clauses taken out of the Bill. Lord Ramsbotham referred to clause 29 as nothing less than “the usurpation of the proper parliamentary process.”

He asked

“how the courts are expected to respond where a young person or child in a particular local authority area is clearly disadvantaged by the arbitrary disapplication or modification of the law as it is applied in all other parts of the country.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 November 2016; Vol. 776, c. 1056.]

As I said earlier, a child needs protection wherever he or she may be in the country. We cannot have a competition between different areas on ways of looking after vulnerable children, some of which will not work and some of which might. Every child needs the protection of the law as set out by Parliament, and it should not be subject to a postcode lottery, as is convenient for certain local authorities.

In the debate in the other place, Lord Low said:

“It is perfectly possible to test different ways of working... within the existing legislative framework... it makes no sense to get rid of the duty.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 November 2016; Vol. 776, c. 1063.]

The squeeze on funding, which Members have mentioned, and which is, I am afraid, inevitable at the moment—[*Interruption.*] I am afraid that it is inevitable because of the disastrous way in which the Labour Government ran the economy into the ground. In too many cases now local authorities are providing only what is their duty; additional services are no longer on the agenda at all. Taking away that duty means that some of these fundamental things could not happen in the future.

Clause 29 as it was would have allowed local authorities to request exemptions from their statutory duties in children’s social care. Every Act of Parliament and every subordinate piece of legislation concerned with children’s social care from 1933 onwards could have been affected. The proposed mechanism for exemption orders was to be statutory instruments, which would have handed over enormous powers to the Secretary of State and the Department for Education. I am afraid that the Minister for School Standards is wrong: the DfE acknowledged that this part of the Bill directly concerns children’s fundamental rights. How can vulnerable children challenge those lack of services? I gave an example—it was one of many examples raised in the House of Lords—of independent reviewing officers. I am a big fan of IROs—I think we can do better, and there is a bit of a postcode lottery—as their role is to stand up and be the voice, or the advocate, of children who are not getting the services to which they are entitled and which they need from local authorities. If no IRO is available because an exemption has been applied for and granted, which means that the authority has no IROs, where is that child to go? There are not just IROs, but key legal protections that exist in the form of regulations now, including the ban on corporal punishment in foster care and children’s homes, protection for disabled children placed away from home, leaving care entitlements and complaints procedures. All of those could be granted an exemption and could disappear from fundamental rights, which we apply to protect vulnerable children now. This would be the first time in the history of children’s welfare that legislation made for all vulnerable children and young people could be disappplied in a particular area. This is a very radical proposal that warranted at least a Green Paper and a White Paper and proper consultation, but there was none.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the NSPCC and Action for Children said that

“the case that the Government is making presents considerable risk. Despite numerous conversations with ministers and officials,

the evidence for the need for this power remains unconvincing and does not justify the potential risks of suspending primary legislation.”

The British Association of Social Workers said:

“If the clauses are re-introduced it will pave the way for significant and dangerous changes to the provision of children’s social care which would jeopardise hard fought victories for children’s rights spanning decades.”

How would the pilots for these provisions be monitored? How would we monitor whether children were still safe and what the results were for those children? It is no surprise that only one in 10 practising social workers surveyed by the BASW and by Unison thought this was a good idea. That is why I have severe reservations if the clause is to be returned to the Bill.

The Munro review took away much of the bureaucracy from social workers. It gave flexibility on the timing of assessments of children and how social workers could prioritise. It gave greater powers and confidence back to social workers to use their professional judgment to do what they thought best in the interests of vulnerable children. Sometimes they will get it wrong. I always say to social workers, “What I want to do, and what the Munro review was all about, is to give you the confidence to make a mistake—hopefully, not often, but to do it for the very best of reasons, not simply because that’s what it says on page 117 of the rule book and you needed to tick the boxes.” That is not what social work is all about. It is not a science. It is a complicated and challenging job.

If we are going to give social workers those flexibilities and allow them to act in different and innovative ways because they think that is the best way of looking after vulnerable children, we do not need to take away the statutory duties of the local authorities which are the corporate parents of those children, so that those new ways do not have to abide by the fundamental duties which ensure that social workers are doing the right thing and looking after those vulnerable children.

Finally, I shall look at a few specific clauses and ask the Minister some questions, which I hope he will refer to in his summing up. Clause 1 is about corporate parenting principles, which I welcome, but it is not clear exactly what they amount to in practice. Are they in addition to the section 23 commitments of the Children Act 1989 or do they replace them? I have used examples which I welcome: promoting physical and mental health, promoting high aspirations and securing the best outcomes for those children and young people. Nobody could vote against such things, but in clause 3 new section 23CZB(7) states:

“Where a former relevant child to whom this section applies is not receiving advice and support under this section, the local authority must offer such advice and support . . . at least once in every 12 months.”

Once in every 12 months will not go very far for a vulnerable child who needs intensive help. Subsection(4) makes provision for personal advisers. The problem is that too many children in care whom I met and children leaving care had never heard of personal advisers, let alone knew who their own personal adviser was.

In clause 4 new section 23ZZA(3) gives a local authority this extraordinary power:

“A local authority in England may do anything else that they consider appropriate with a view to promoting the educational achievement of relevant children educated in their area”—

[Tim Loughton]

motherhood and apple pie. Why do we require that sort of thing in legislation? It strikes me that a bit much of this is a bit too mushy and full of cotton wool—too many vague assumptions which in practice, particularly with funding pressures and duties taken away, will not amount to a row of beans, if we are not careful.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Obviously, the primary focus and concern is the duty of care to children, but there is also the issue of mothers who might well end up having successive children who end up in care. The local authority needs to have a responsibility for those vulnerable women, who may well be victims of a coercive relationship and have complex needs as a result. The sooner there is intervention and therapeutic care, the better, to avoid subsequent issues—maybe subsequent children and subsequent costs and concerns for all.

Tim Loughton: My hon. Friend, who has great expertise in this area, is right. Of course we cannot look at vulnerable children in isolation; we need to look at their families holistically. There are some really good examples. I hope that the Minister will stick to his word and provide funding for things such as FDAC, the family drug and alcohol court set up by the excellent Nick Crichton, a fantastic family district judge.

At FDAC, a mother—often a single mother—at risk of losing a child to the care system because of substance abuse or an abusive partner, say, is given a clear choice of an intensive package that will help her back on to the straight and narrow so that she can bring up her own child. It is a tough, challenging exercise. Alternatively, perhaps both parents will be involved. If they are able to do that, the whole family is put back together and the child stays, which is the best outcome. If not, that child will head for care.

I have sat in court, as has my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who will speak shortly, seeing mums who have had six, seven or eight children taken into the care system. We have to tackle the root of that problem: why is it? Is it that the mother just does not know how to parent, in which case what are society, social workers and the troubled families programme doing to help her become a fit parent if she remotely can? If she cannot, that child must go to a safe family elsewhere who can give them a second chance of a beneficial and happy upbringing.

I would like to make a few other quick points, Mr Deputy Speaker; I am aware that there are not too many speakers for this debate, so I have an opportunity to elaborate on some important points a little longer than the Chair normally allows. I know how generous you are in these matters, which are of great interest to you.

Clause 5 is about the designation of a member of staff at school

“having responsibility for promoting the educational achievement” of children in the care system. That is a good initiative, but it already exists for children with caring responsibilities and alas that does not work in practice. It is a good idea, but it has to have some teeth so that it means something on the ground: that children in the care system have special attention from a designated teacher who understands the particular needs of such children,

who are often subject to bullying, mental health problems and everything else. There must be more than a clause on paper in a Bill: the proposal has to work in practice.

There are some good points on the child safeguarding review panels, although I have concerns about the independence of the panels. Certainly when we gave a commitment before the 2010 election that we would publish serious case reviews—opposed by the Labour party, although the reviews have now become the norm—one of my concerns was also about the calibre of the people producing those SCRs and the quality of some of the reports. Effectively, they were not properly monitored; they were monitored only on a local basis. Some time ago, I put forward the idea that a national body should oversee the quality and that there should be a national register of authors of serious case reviews with a requirement for continuous professional development; there needed to be training, which would be updated. Before now, anybody, effectively, could apply to be the author of a serious case review. We need to regulate that important area rather better.

Under clause 13, the panel

“must publish the report, unless they consider it inappropriate to do so.”

Given that, previously, when serious case reviews were published, they were seen only by a few people locally and Department for Education officials if we were lucky, it was really important that, other than in exceptional circumstances where there could be detriment to surviving children or families, the reviews should be published and the lessons learned to see how they could apply elsewhere. This new review panel is an exercise in doing that and in disseminating best practice rather better. I very much support that, and I would like more details on how it is going to work.

Then, however, we have the section about safeguarding partners. These appear to be replacing the local safeguarding children boards, which are a really important feature of bringing together local agencies to make sure that we have workable solutions and partnerships in place, particularly to deal with child sexual exploitation at the moment. We need to be convinced about how these new bodies are better than, or different from, local safeguarding children boards and, in particular, about how they are going to be funded. Clause 20, on funding, says:

“The safeguarding partners for a local authority area in England may make payments”

towards the expenditure of these bodies

“by contributing to a fund”

or making payments directly. It also says:

“Relevant agencies for a local authority area...may make payments”.

The problem with LSCBs at the moment is that not all the partners pull their weight. In too many cases, key partners are, first, not turning up at the table and, secondly, not helping to fund the work of the LSCBs. Too often, it falls to the local authority—the default partner—to pick up too much of the tab. If we are going to put these things on a statutory basis, can we make sure that it is laid out clearly and unequivocally that the funding contribution from, and the active participation of, all the relevant partners is absolutely essential?

I am also concerned because clause 21 says:

“The safeguarding partners for two or more local authority areas in England may agree that their areas are to be treated as a single area”.

How big can they be? It is important that LSCBs are able to come up with local safeguarding plans and local plans to tackle child sexual exploitation in their areas—plans that are relevant to Rotherham, given the particular problems there, to Rochdale or to wherever. If these bodies are going to be looking after huge areas, their effect will surely be diluted in key hotspots. The Bill also talks about having cross-border constabulary co-operation, but these are very large areas, and I am concerned about how big these new bodies could become.

On the part of the Bill about the new body, Social Work England, I think we need to improve the regulation of social workers. I am not sure whether this is the right way to do it, and I would like to see more details. The demise of the College of Social Work is a shame, and I think it would have performed a lot of this function if it had been allowed to continue and to thrive. A lot of effort went into setting it up in the first place.

I am also concerned about the independence of Social Work England. My understanding is that it will be an Executive agency of the Department for Education, and we need to have some clarity over that.

The Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families (Edward Timpson): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Tim Loughton: Yes—I am delighted I am getting a response.

Edward Timpson: I can reassure my hon. Friend that the new Social Work England regulatory body will not be an Executive agency; it will be a non-departmental public body, so it will be at arm's length from the Government and provide the independence that people called for and that I think is right.

Tim Loughton: I am grateful, and gratefully reassured, and I look forward to being able to support that provision, as opposed to some others that I am not so reassured about.

In clause 31, one of the overarching objectives of Social Work England is

“to promote and maintain public confidence in social workers in England”,

and that is quite right. However, that is also the job of the chief social worker. One disappointment to me is that when we set up the chief social worker—originally, it was to be one chief social worker covering the elderly and children, but then it was split into a child social worker and an adult care social worker—the point was for them to be a high-profile face of social work, particularly for the public, and a reassuring face of child protection for the public in times of high-profile tragedies and disasters involving safeguarding issues. Therefore, while the current chief social worker for children said recently:

“I don't pretend I am the voice of the profession. I am a civil servant and I see my role”

as

“offering advice to ministers based on what other people tell me about a the system”,

I think there is more to the role. This person must not just be a civil servant. They need to work closely alongside Ministers and civil servants, but equally—in action out on the street—to work alongside social workers, consultant social workers and practitioners at the sharp end. We need to revisit the balance that we currently have in that regard.

I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker, for going on at length. This is a subject that interests me enormously. I have spent most of my career in Parliament involved with child safeguarding and child protection. I am very proud of the progress that has been made over years, but very worried that we still have a long way to go. Most of this Bill will help in that journey, but certain parts will not. I hope that when scrutinising the Bill in Committee and on Report, the Government reflect a little more before they rush to do some things that clearly are not in the best interests of vulnerable children.

5.35 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): It is a true pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and his detailed, precise and, some might say, exhaustive analysis of the Bill before us. I think I can speak for all Labour Members in saying that we share many of the concerns that he outlined about getting right the legislation on how we protect young people in our country. I associate myself with the excellent introduction by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) in which she raised Labour Members' concerns about the Bill while recognising that many parts are welcome and could take us forward. We share the wish across the House to provide the best safeguarding for all children.

I see this Bill as being about how we best support our children in an imperfect world—a world that we are all painfully aware of through our casework and work within our communities. That is why we all share the concern expressed by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham about the importance of partnership working—in particular, working with professionals. Many of us will have dealt with cases where we are acutely aware that we are not professionals but wish to help, and where the guidance of social workers with years of experience in complex and delicate matters has been of vital assistance to us. We therefore recognise that not involving them in this conversation may take us backwards rather than forwards as a country. Some of us have real concerns about what will replace the local safeguarding boards, and how we make sure that the multi-partnership work that has worked in some parts of the country and led to some significant changes is not lost in the process of recognising where change is needed.

In a wish not to indulge one of the customs of this House where the same thing is said several times, let me try to offer the Minister some ideas about things that I believe are missing from the Bill. I hope that we will find cross-party consensus in adding to it. One of those things, as well as a concern to avoid any suggestion of privatising such a delicate and important service, is to make sure that in talking about safeguarding we involve the concept of prevention, particularly the idea of acting earlier within the system to make sure that children are protected. I am particularly drawn to clause 16, which talks about the safeguarding and promotion of welfare of all children, and the role that local authorities might play in that.

Bearing in mind the comments of the Minister, who is sadly no longer in his place, about ensuring that a robust safeguarding system is in place, I wish to let him know that I will table amendments to bring in one of the most crucial parts of safeguarding we have yet to get right—sex and relationships education for all young

[Stella Creasy]

people. We cannot say that we safeguard our children when we make sure that they are taught about composting but not consent. Many of us may have stories of our own sex and relationships education. I might have feared that I was forever scarred by having once fallen asleep in a classroom only to be awoken by somebody waving a female condom in my face. However, it is no laughing matter. Many of us are acutely aware of the many pressures on our young people that we need to be able to address, and, crucially, in a positive and inclusive manner. All parents will tell us that they are concerned about the world today. In a former lifetime, I was a youth worker, and we used to say that we had all been 15-year-olds but none of us had been 15-year-olds in today's world. I am incredibly grateful, for a start, that Facebook was not around when I was at school. One third of young girls in this country report being sexually harassed at school. Three quarters of girls in a Girlguiding survey said that they were anxious about sexual harassment in their age group, and 5,500 sexual offences, including 600 rapes, were recorded in UK schools over the past three years alone.

I say that not to make parents fearful, but to ask what we can do to make sure that every young person in this country has the tools and the confidence to lead the lives that we would all wish for them, and to be able to know when no means no and yes means yes. That is why it is important that we do not let it become the internet that educates our young people or the playground that tells them what passes for acceptable sexual conduct, but that we give every young person the kind of training that we would want for our own children.

That is not a critique of parents. Indeed, many parents work very hard to make sure that their children have good ideas about sex and relationships education. We need to recognise that parents can only ever be 50% of the answer, because this is also about the other children that children will meet. Giving every child good sex and relationships education should be considered part of safeguarding, because it will make sure that every young person, whoever they come into contact with, has the skills and the tools to lead the life that they wish to lead and to deal with the modern world as it is, not as some might wish it to be.

I know that Members across the House will support that proposal. I am mindful of the support of the Select Committee Chairs, one of whom—the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller)—is in her place. I was taken by her Committee's report, but this is not just about the Women and Equalities Committee: the Select Committees on Home Affairs, Education, Health, and Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy all agree that now is the time to make sure that every child is given access to good sex and relationships education.

Mr Burrowes: The hon. Lady has prayed in aid the Home Affairs Committee. I think that she is referring to the previous Chair, the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), who signed up to a letter, but he did not do so on behalf of the Committee. As a member of that Committee, I did not support it. I certainly support proposals for high-quality sex and relationships education. There are ways of achieving that, not least through building resilience and supporting families, which is

what the Bill is about. We can do that in lots of ways, not just the path suggested by the hon. Lady. I ask her to please acknowledge that there is significant opposition to her proposal.

Stella Creasy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, but I hope that we will be able to change his mind during our discussion. We have been having this debate for some time, and I tell him plainly that the young people of Britain are crying out for this kind of education. Time and again they say, "Ignorance is not bliss; confidence is what we want." It is not about replacing parents; it is about supporting them and making sure that young people, wherever they are, have the right environment. It is too important not to listen to our young people when they ask for this kind of education to be done in an age-appropriate fashion in their schools. Now is the time to get it right. Select Committee Chairs acknowledge that, and, although the hon. Gentleman did not support the letter, I believe that many do. It is right that we have this debate and I hope that we can allay those fears, because the consequence of not doing so is to leave young people at risk, and I do not think that that is acceptable in the 21st century.

I agreed with the Secretary of State for Education when she said that she was minded to see this happen and that she wanted to consider all the options, and I believe that this Bill is the right way to do it. There were discussions about doing it as part of the proposed education Bill, but that has stalled, for whatever reason. The matter is too important to delay any longer. That means using this legislative opportunity to acknowledge that, in order to safeguard every young person, they need to be taught about consent—not just the biology of sex, but how to have positive, equal and safe relationships. The honest truth is that that is not happening for too many of our young people and we are seeing the consequences.

I will ask the Government to make sure that that work is part of safeguarding at a local level; that schools are given the guidance to make it available to every young person in an age-appropriate and inclusive way; that they work with communities; and, above all, that they do not simply consult, but set a timetable, because for too long our young people have been asking us to get this right, and for too long their voice has not been heard.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) is no longer in his place, but I hope that there will be cross-party support for amendments that I will table on this subject. I will certainly seek that support, and I know that many Labour Members—including, I suspect, the Front-Bench team—will support those amendments. I would be happy to sit down with Ministers and look at how we can make these proposals work, because I do not think that any of us can be happy with the situation that obtains. There is general agreement that this needs to happen, and yet there is no legislation to make it happen. We are failing our young people if we keep kicking this issue into the long grass.

I hope that I can convince the Minister that there will be cross-party support on another area as well. Although the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) is yet to be convinced about the case for the changes I have just outlined, I hope that he will be convinced to back the amendments that I will propose on child

refugees. He and I were certainly on the same side when it came to supporting the young people left in Calais. I acknowledge the Minister's statement about safeguarding child refugees and recognising the importance of extending safeguarding proposals to our young people. However, I believe that his statement was undermined by the guidance that was issued by the Home Office at the same time. The Minister's statement caused the noble Lord Dubs—a tremendous champion of our child refugees—to withdraw his amendment to this very Bill about this very matter. That amendment was withdrawn on the basis that there was good will across the House about making sure that we safeguarded child refugees, including during the process of transferring them from overseas to the UK.

Catherine West: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her outstanding work on unaccompanied asylum seekers, who are often voiceless. Does she think that enough is being done to provide post-trauma and post-traumatic stress counselling for those children, who have seen things that are quite unimaginably horrible?

Stella Creasy: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. Counselling should be part of the safeguarding process.

Many of us who deal with these young people are concerned about the fact that many of them are still in France, precisely because of the guidance issued by the Home Office, which set out a two-step process and specified that nationality would be one of the criteria for helping child refugees—ahead of their best interests. It cannot be in the best interests of a child to put nationality before need, and I hope that the Minister will recognise that the detail in his statement of 1 November is undermined by such a strategy. It is right that we clarify in amendments to the Bill that the country will always put the best interests of a child first, and that includes child refugees.

Mr Burrowes: I was with the hon. Lady on the Dubs II amendment. Perhaps the link with her proposed amendments is that we can agree on the outcomes, but the question is how we achieve them. If we will the ends, is a prescribed piece of statute needed or are there other means to achieve what we want? We will debate amendments about SRE at a later stage, but the issue with her proposals about safeguarding is the practical implementation. We saw with the Dubs amendment that we need to pay careful attention to practical implementation. Prescribed legislation is not always required, but we need to hold the Minister to account and ensure that he stays true to the good words in his statement.

Stella Creasy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point. I agree with much of what he has said about the difference between having to prescribe, and recognising locally led solutions. However, I disagree with him fundamentally on both points for precisely the reason that he is putting out. The outcomes that are being achieved are not what we desired; they are not the will of this place. The desired outcome in sex and relationships education is not being achieved at a local level because there is no clarity about what schools should be teaching, so too many young people are not getting the appropriate support. Even with the best will in the world and the

best parenting, unless we wrap those children up in cotton wool, the other young people they meet may present a risk to them.

So, too, with child refugees. Sadly, with the Dubs amendments, good will has slowly ebbed away in this place when the implementation has not matched the outcome that we desired. Nowhere is that clearer than when the Government try to say that nationality is more important than need. Many of us were delighted by the statement that the Minister made on 1 November, and then we were horrified to read the Home Office guidance, which seemed to stand against the spirit of the statement. I believe it is necessary to clarify that we must always act in the best interests of those children, just as Lord Dubs sought to act in their best interests when he tabled his original amendment.

The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate will know the battle that we have had throughout proceedings on the legislation. As difficult and uncomfortable as some of the debates may be, and although some people may have concerns about child refugees, we must surely all want to act in their best interests. I am sorry to have to tell the Minister that some of the Government's conduct has led many of us to believe that amendments are necessary. I will seek support from across the House to make this happen so that we can put the matter beyond doubt, because, sadly, the guidance from the Home Office does cast doubt on it.

I do not wish to echo the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham in terms of length—not to undermine anything he said—but through my proposals I am looking forward to being part of the legislative process. I am looking forward to scrutinising the Bill. I am looking forward to seeking cross-party agreement on these issues, because all of us in this House recognise that protecting children is one of the most important jobs we do. There may be disagreements about how to get there, but we do have to get there. We cannot avoid these issues any more. Whether it is our young people facing an uncertain world or the young people stuck in child centres in France right now, we have a responsibility for all of them, just as we have a responsibility for children through our corporate parenting rules. I hope that the Minister will listen and respond on all these issues. I am happy to meet him, as I am sure are many others, but we will not rest until this is resolved.

5.50 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and to have heard not only Opposition Members' broad support for the Bill, but the important points they have raised. There can never be too much consensus on these issues. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said, we just need to do better for vulnerable children. Challenge is part of that, as are new ideas. We cannot allow the Bill to be a missed opportunity in terms of prevention or the knowledge we give to children, because they are as much a part of the safeguarding process as any other structure or law that we put through this place.

The focus of the Bill is very much children who cannot remain in the family home, but its scope has been widened, particularly through Government amendments made in the other place, to broader issues around child

[Mrs Maria Miller]

welfare. I will focus on some of the broader issues, particularly the provisions regarding adopted children and ongoing support for them; the more contentious issue of the power to innovate, which some Members have talked about today, the measures on which were voted down in the other place; and, finally, what more the Bill could do to improve the welfare of children and to empower children.

The Bill proposes improvements to the long-term placement of children for adoption and the assessment of their current and future needs through care orders. I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to tell the House how the new measure sits alongside recent Government announcements on the adoption support fund. In particular, I am thinking about the interim cap on financial support that was put in place midway through the financial year.

The adoption support fund ensures that important therapeutic support can be funded for adopted children, some of whom are coping with difficult trauma, complex and challenging behaviour, and mental health problems. That can result in a high risk of adoption breakdown. The fund already helps thousands of families—I believe it was 3,500 last year—and the Government are increasing the budget to about £23 million this year. That significant investment perhaps underlines the Minister's deep knowledge of the subject and his understanding of the challenges that parents of adopted children face, which he has gained from his own family's experiences. I put on record my thanks to the Minister for all that he has done to support families with adopted children. I know that my constituents are enormously grateful for his expertise in this area.

Perhaps we should be unsurprised to hear that the demand for the fund has outstripped the supply of finances. The Minister, with the inevitable fiscal duties on him, had to introduce a cap to the budget in October. Although that was understandable as a normal response to keep control of budgetary pressures, it has inevitably created uncertainties for families such as my constituents, Mr and Mrs Cross, who adopted their son in August 2013. Mr and Mrs Cross are incredible. They have adopted a young child with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder which, as many will know, means their son requires significant support.

Mr and Mrs Cross have taken the necessary measures and are doing a fantastic job. The child's therapy has been hugely beneficial, leading to real progress, but because it costs in excess of the new £5,000 cap, it is uncertain whether the funding will be available in the near future. The next phase of treatment costs about £10,000 and would require the local authority in Hampshire to match fund, in year, any costs over £5,000. Clause 8 calls for long-term plans for the care of a child to be in place, yet my constituents, who have made an incredible choice to care for a severely disabled child, are now unsure whether his care can be funded. I hope that the Minister, perhaps in his response to the debate, will reflect on how a local authority such as mine in Hampshire might respond, and reassure Mr and Mrs Cross that the support for their child will continue.

The second issue I want to speak about is the controversial power to innovate, which was contentious in the other place. Indeed, the then clauses 15 to 18 were

removed from the Bill after a vote. The provisions would have allowed local authorities to apply to the Secretary of State to test new ways of raising children's outcomes and to allow high-performing local authorities to be involved in that work. It is important that we pay heed to the strongly held concerns raised by expert voices, not just in the other place but outwith this place, and I will be interested to hear the Minister's response to those concerns, which have been echoed again today.

None the less, the Department has put in place something that we need to look at again: the idea of giving "partners in practice"—my local authority in Hampshire is one of only eight in the country—the opportunity to look at innovative ways of working. If we are to find better ways to care for the vulnerable children about whom we all feel so deeply, we need to be open to new ideas, so I hope that we can revisit this idea, which was strongly supported by my local authority as well as experts such as Professor Eileen Munro. It is right that this tightly regulated area is as protected as it is, but I cannot believe that there would not be a benefit from our looking at new ways of working. We will all have seen examples of that in today's briefings.

The problem might be—hon. Members might have put their finger on it today—that the proposals came somewhat out of the blue, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham said. We need to take care that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater. I do not think that the Minister had any intention for the proposals to create competition between local authorities; rather, the intention was to drive improvement, which we would all applaud. No one is suggesting that this approach would do anything other than drive innovation in an area that has developed, inevitably, in a piecemeal way in response to the various and sometimes quite appalling situations in which local authorities have found themselves.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham talked about the need for policy and law to work in practice. When I read the *Hansard* report of what the Minister in the other place said, I felt that that was exactly the purpose of the proposals. I think the intention is that local authorities are able to look at how they can make the law work in practice, rather than creating something of a postcode lottery. When there is an insight into better ways of working, authorities need to be able to pass it on to other areas to improve the way in which we care for this vulnerable group of individuals.

The final issue I want to raise, building on what the hon. Member for Walthamstow said, is what we are doing to empower children themselves, especially vulnerable children who might not have the consistent involvement of their parents in their lives and who, frankly, face really difficult situations when they have to take decisions about their own welfare without the input of other adults to guide them. This Bill is one of many pieces of legislation that have put in place laws, procedures and protocols to help to protect and improve the welfare of children through a whole host of agencies, but that does not directly address what we will do to help those children themselves. We need to ensure that they are armed with the knowledge that they need to make the right choices to safeguard themselves.

That is not a new concept, but something that we have done for many years. For example, we have tried to encourage children to understand the dangers of drugs,

alcohol and, indeed, early pregnancy. It is important to take that forward in a more structured way. As parents and carers, we know that we have the prime responsibility to protect our children, but we also know that our children need the ability to make good choices. We cannot be there 24/7; social workers cannot be there 24/7. It is crucial that children have the ability to make decisions themselves in an informed way.

The Bill provides a perfect opportunity for the Government to respond positively to the five Select Committee Chairs who have called for PSHE and, in particular, sex and relationships education, to be made compulsory for school-age children. I am one of those Select Committee Chairs. Our work taking evidence on our recent inquiry on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools was a sobering experience for all members of our Select Committee.

We need to help to empower children to make their own decisions. When we hear the evidence and some of the statistics about the challenges that young people face in respect of their own personal welfare, it becomes clear that this debate is overdue and that we need to take action now. Two thirds of girls regularly experience sexual harassment in school. Children as young as eight are seeing online pornography as a place to learn about sex, and there were 47,000 sexual offences against children in this country in the last year, a third of which were perpetrated by children against other children. Communities should be able to enjoy freedom and safety, and school communities are no different from any others.

When we look at what happens to children after their school life, we find that, according to a study by the National Union of Students, 68% of students say that they are subject to verbal or physical sexual harassment on campuses. The problem does not stop there, as some 85% of women are experiencing unwanted sexual attention in public places.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow is absolutely right when she says that this is all about prevention and making sure that we can stop these problems from happening in the first place by ensuring that children have the knowledge they need to make good decisions, to understand what consent means, and to achieve some control over their own personal space and their own bodies.

The Bill has been extensively debated in the other place, where many amendments were tabled, particularly relating to the importance for the welfare of children of joint working between agencies, including local authorities, the police and clinical commissioning groups. In the other place, the Government tabled amendment 113, which dealt with that, because they recognised that a multifaceted strategy was vital to children's welfare.

Another set of organisations also have a crucial role to play in children's welfare: schools. If the Bill is to do what it sets out to do and to promote welfare for children, it must make sex and relationships education compulsory. What is currently compulsory in secondary schools is the science of reproduction; the rest is based on guidance that was last updated at the turn of the millennium and makes no reference to pornography, through which, as we know, more young children are finding out about sex. We also know that 40% of schools do not teach SRE very well. Perhaps all that explains why organisations such as Barnardo's have made clear that the development of an early understanding

of and respect for each other's bodies, and a knowledge of when to ask for help through PSHE, can help to build resilience and an understanding of what healthy relationships look like, as well as mitigating the effects of exposure to such things as pornography.

Tim Loughton: I am closely following what my right hon. Friend is saying and agree with much of it. As is the wont of speeches on Bills concerning children, hers is straying into a number of subjects that relate to children but are not dealt with in the Bill, but I support her on this subject. Does she agree that one way of securing the better-quality PHSE and SRE that we desperately need would be to bring in experts from outside schools, especially young experts such as youth workers? They could empathise with young people who would listen to them, take notice of them and act on their advice. Would that not be better than giving the task to Mrs Miggins the geography teacher who just happens to have a couple of free periods on a Thursday afternoon?

Mrs Miller: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Expertise is necessary when it comes to teaching those subjects. However, as I have said, I have raised this issue because if we are to tackle the welfare of children, we must ensure that we do so effectively. It is no good leaving children out of the equation; we must tackle their welfare head on. While I do not disagree with my hon. Friend's point that undertrained teachers will not provide effective sex and relationships education, I think that all teachers—whether they are Mrs Miggins teaching geography or anyone else—need to understand how they can stop the sexual harassment and sexual violence that too many young people told the Committee they took for granted in their everyday school lives, and which we would never take for granted as adults. All teachers should have some sort of training in this sphere because they are responsible for the wellbeing of children while they are at school.

Stella Creasy: The right hon. Lady will know that I completely agree with everything that she is saying. May I help her by reassuring the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) that her speech is entirely in order in relation to the Bill? Clause 16 not only deals with the promotion of the welfare of children in local authority areas, but requires local authorities to work with the "relevant agencies", which are those that are exercising functions in relation to children in their areas. That is exactly what schools do, and that is why we need to do this now.

Mrs Miller: I thank the hon. Lady for her helpful intervention.

We sometimes worry about raising the issue of sex and relationships in the House because we feel that we are taking away a primary function of parents, but that is not the way parents see it. Research conducted by YouGov shows that 90% of parents want compulsory SRE because they understand the pressures that their children are under. Those pressures have the potential to undermine the welfare of those children, especially when they are at school. Teachers understand that, too. They understand the importance of helping young people to navigate, in an appropriate way, the pressures of being a teenager in the internet world.

[Mrs Miller]

There is overwhelming evidence of the need for change and I make no apology for underlining it today for the Minister's benefit. Five Select Committee Chairs have made the same point as a result of work that their Committees have done, and the Department for Education itself told the Education Committee that good PSHE underpins good academic achievement. We know that children who have received sex and relationships education and PSHE more broadly are less likely to engage in risky behaviour and much more likely to seek help when things go wrong. Children need to be able to recognise abuse, grooming and predatory behaviour. As Alison Hadley of the University of Bedfordshire told the Education Committee, if children have no

“ammunition to understand these things, no wonder they are ending up in very dangerous situations.”

Educating children about this is not an optional extra; it needs to be mandatory and an integral part of the Government's safeguarding strategy.

In January 2014, in response to the Education Committee's report, the Government said that they would work to ensure that all schools deliver high-quality PSHE, but 40% still do not. In November 2014, the Government established an expert group for PSHE, which recommended that PSHE should be a statutory entitlement for all pupils. Two years on, can the Minister update the House on the progress that has been made on the issue, which 90% of parents want action on, and which Girlguiding, End Violence Against Women, the NSPCC and Barnardo's—the list goes on—are calling for action on?

I call on the Minister to put in place a timetable for action, including a comprehensive consultation to ensure that we get this right. No one is calling for rushed measures but, as Members have said, the issue of making SRE compulsory has been ongoing for some time. Of course the education should be age-relevant in all cases, and any proposal should be implemented in a way that brings the whole House together, because that is always the best way to handle such important cross-party issues.

6.11 pm

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I am pleased to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). I very much welcome this debate and the time and focus that this Government are devoting to the outcomes for children who are looked after and to the social work profession. However, I must declare an interest. My sister is a senior practising social worker and, prior to becoming a Member for Parliament, I worked for Supported Fostering Services in a contact supervisor capacity. I am also still connected with that charity as I remain an independent visitor for one of our looked-after children.

I consider myself to be extremely lucky. I was brought up in a safe and loving environment and was given the necessary tools to go out into the big wide world and make my own way. In 2007, via my sister, I got involved for the first time with Supported Fostering Services. That was the first time I had the privilege to meet and work with some of our looked-after children, their families, carers and social workers, and to see at first hand the challenges that our young people and the

social work profession face. There has been an increase in children becoming looked after, and some of that has been attributed to the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, representing 6% of the looked-after population. I have also seen at a local level the increase in the number of children in care.

In that environment, it is right that this Government, and society, are putting the outcomes of our young people at the top of the agenda. It is also right that there is a focus on the decisions made about the futures of those young people. In my limited involvement over the past nine years, I have seen some fantastic outcomes for our young people, but far too many disappointing ones—some due to decisions made about their futures and to a lack of understanding of the child and of the use of timely interventions that are best for that child.

One young person who has been in care for over 10 years since the age of four has had to go through unbelievable experiences, which even an adult would struggle to cope with—being split from siblings, attending therapy, a failed adoption, time in a therapeutic centre, and number of foster placements and social workers. That young person has amazing strength of character and a resilience that we could only hope to have. Luckily, an amazing placement has now been found and that person will succeed, but it will be in spite of some of the interventions and not solely because of them.

If a young person is ready for adoption by a family that is the perfect match, no one would disagree that adoption for the child should be a major consideration for social services and the courts. Achieving the best outcomes for that young person should be the duty and focus of social services and the courts. Unfortunately, I have seen decisions on adoptions being delayed by too much focus being placed on challenges by the birth parents and on their needs, even after several reports from professionals have recommended a decision. Allowing judgments to be challenged over long periods does not put the interests of the child first.

A social worker once told me that she did not like adoptions and that they made her feel nervous. I asked her why, and she said that the stakes were too high. At the time, I did not know quite what she meant and I thought it rather an odd thing for a social worker to say. However, having subsequently seen the damage that a failed adoption can cause, I finally understand. Relationships with children are like all relationships. We as adults do not like everybody we come into contact with, and it is the same for children. We ask a lot of children and adopters when, after an introduction period of perhaps only two weeks, we put those strangers together and hope that it works out okay. I know that the process is far more complicated than that, but fundamentally we hope that a good relationship will be built after only a short honeymoon period and that the adopters and children will be given the support they need to make it a success.

I have seen children being given the best chance of a great life when their adoption has worked, but once an adoption order has gone through, the support from the agencies stops. The stakes are high with adoption. It should be regarded as the perfect solution, but its success will always be dependent on the individual child, and the use of special guardianships and placements should not be undermined by a focus on adoption.

I welcome the fact that support for care leavers features heavily in the Bill, through the local offer and the extension of personal advisers. This is a major step forward in supporting this vulnerable group of young people as they make the difficult transition from coming out of care to going it alone. Some of our young people have had upbringings and experiences that we would struggle to comprehend. The care system tries to wrap them in a safety blanket, so a child in care can be far less prepared to go it alone without a support network of trusted people giving guidance, or to make decisions for themselves after most decisions have been made for them up to that point.

It is a long outdated view that once a young person reaches 18 or even their early 20s, they do not need any help. I very much welcome the extension of personal advisers to work with our young people to ensure they get access to the services they need, to give them the support they deserve in order for them to succeed, and to put them on the pathway to achieving their full potential. That is great, and I very much welcome it, but will the Minister tell us how this will work in practice? Will personal advisers always be social workers? How will plans for young people leaving care be monitored and evaluated to ensure that this is not just a box-ticking exercise by local authorities, that it provides meaningful help, support and advice to our vulnerable young people and that the personal advisers get to know the young person and truly understand their needs?

The local offer will be extremely important to young people, but we know that due to local authorities' budget burdens the availability of that support will very much depend on a council's priorities unless there is a statutory obligation to deliver the services. Investment in our most vulnerable young people at this crucial time in their lives can only bring rewards, and I would like to see high-quality offers from local authorities for our young people.

A high proportion of formerly looked-after children are not in education, employment or training. We also know that leaving care and going it alone can present barriers to prevent a young person from moving forward with their life in a positive way, even though they might think of this time as being exciting and full of hope. However, some of those young people will never have to manage their finances while in care and are therefore much more vulnerable to getting into debt and not being able to manage without the safety net that a family or carer can provide. We must ensure that young people are given all the tools they need to succeed. They deserve to be treated differently in terms of accommodation provision and access to funds so that they are able to move forward and get the best chance to succeed. My constituency contains a young offenders institution and a secure training centre and, sadly, too many of the young people in such institutions were once looked-after children. That is a direct outcome of not only what they experienced growing up, but a lack of support and access to the services they needed as they moved towards adulthood.

My final point relates to social workers. Policemen, doctors, nurses and firemen are public servants, and many sectors of our society stand up to defend them and will hear no criticism. However, social workers are often criticised, blamed and singled out when something goes wrong. They put up with a negative dialogue about

their profession, including stereotypes and being dismissed as interfering do-gooders. However, our social workers should be held in the highest esteem as professionals who make decisions, intervene to protect children and families from harm, work with families to help them stay together and have an impact on outcomes—day in, day out. They see some of the most terrible situations on a daily basis, including where children are being neglected or physically and mentally abused, and they work with children who have severe, complex disabilities. Social workers do not go into social work for the money; they do it because they want to protect children—often a thankless task.

I remember when my sister was working in a duty team and would struggle to sleep at night as she worried about what was happening within some families after she went home. She feared what she would be presented with when she got into work in the morning. That is not unusual. It is the daily life of a front-line social worker. I welcome the creation of Social Work England, even though the profession has some concerns about the change. Social work is so important and it is right to have a regulator focused on raising standards, good practice and strengthening formal training pathways. However, I spoke to several social workers before today's debate and, owing to the level of their caseloads, some were not even aware of the Bill.

Social workers carry out a mentally and emotionally demanding job, and I feel that one element has been missed. There is a high burnout rate among front-line social workers and individual social worker caseloads are far too high in some parts of the country, causing some to feel unsafe in their work. For example, a social worker working 40 hours a week with a caseload of 20 would have only two hours a week per case. The casework could involve a mixture of children in need, court cases or child protection, all requiring a different amount of attention in any one week. Some cases require a significant amount of time and yet we expect social workers to know the children and the family and be able to make safe decisions. Such circumstances do not give our professionals the opportunity for thinking space or allow them to carry out the preventive work that many want to do. The nature of their work means that every child and family is different, and social workers innovate every day within the current framework in sometimes challenging circumstances.

In conclusion, everyone in the House should champion outcomes for children, who will go on to become the parents, workers and leaders of the future. It is unacceptable in this century for some of our young people's future to be predictable based on their past or where they have come from. State intervention must work, and I hope that this Government will continue to push for better outcomes for vulnerable looked-after children.

6.24 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): It was my choice to be last today, so I am very pleased to be speaking now. It is a great honour to follow my very hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), who made an excellent speech, and I completely agree with her on the support for adoptive parents; I have a close relative who has adopted three children and it really is not easy, so I completely agree.

[Mrs Flick Drummond]

I am very pleased with this Bill, and particularly welcome some of its measures, including on decision-making support for looked-after children, and especially the raising of the age of care leavers to 25 in respect of local authority services. I know that young people in their 20s still need looking after, having four of my own in their 20s. There is plenty of evidence to show that the brain does not fully develop until 25, and the state needs to keep its parental responsibility until young people are firmly launched.

In March 2016 there were 70,440 looked-after children in England, and based on the 2016 data there were 26,340 care leavers aged 19, 20 or 21, of whom 40% were not in employment, education or training, compared with 14 % of all 19 to 21-year-olds who did not go through the care service. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said, 4% of these care leavers end up in the criminal justice system.

The role of the corporate parent is to safeguard the young, but there is a resource aspect to it. Portsmouth children's services estimates that if a young person is kept out of a single involvement in the criminal justice system, it saves the state £100,000 in various ways, for instance in avoiding the need for probation services, the cost of the criminal justice system and social services for rehabilitation.

I also mentioned the increase in age on Second Reading of the Homelessness Reduction Bill a couple of weeks ago. Many twenty-somethings are still living at home, and therefore we need to look after the housing of our care leavers, too. That protection should follow the care leavers around the country, so, like any other young person, they are looked after by either the local authority where they have settled or their original local authority. I welcome the amendment of the Earl of Listowel for a national offer for care leavers. Independent living is very different from living in the care environment in terms of budgeting and looking for jobs, and there is also the question of setting up home, including dealing with bills and council tax. I hope that the national offer will be accepted and personal advisers are clearly identified.

On social workers, I welcome the establishment of Social Work England as an independent non-departmental public body. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham mentioned, I worked with him on a commission on children's social workers in 2007, called "No More Blame Game". Some of the recommendations were adopted—for instance, that of the chief social worker—but the General Social Care Council, which was the regulator, folded in 2012, and the new regulator, the Health and Care Professions Council, looks after many other jobs. It is important that social work is seen as a unique job, and therefore we must recognise that it is a separate profession, on a level with other professionals such as doctors and nurses.

Some of the other recommendations have already been accepted, but I thought it would be a good idea to remind the Minister in case he has not read the report. The first recommendation is that the generic nature of social work must be maintained and resources better targeted to enable social workers to work with families in a preventive role. That is largely happening already. There is also the role of the consultant social worker,

which I think is what the sister of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood does. That senior practitioner has been introduced to keep experienced social workers on the frontline, rather than putting them into management. That requires an appropriate career and pay structure to be put in place to support them, because if they do not want to go into management, there is no other way of going forward.

Thirdly, every social worker should be encouraged and have an opportunity to become a member of a professional body similar to the British Medical Association or Royal College of Nursing, which could advocate on their behalf, negotiate on salaries and conditions of services, provide good public relations on behalf of the profession as a whole, and influence future Government policy. Consideration should also be given to a requirement that employers, including agency employers, fund this membership for the first post-qualifying year to ensure that all entrants to the profession can become members.

We also recommended that there should be a chief social worker—an idea we took from New Zealand, where it works incredibly successfully. This person would work across Departments, and with Unison, the British Association of Social Workers, other representative bodies and, in particular, the media. Again, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood mentioned that the attitude some people take to social work is appalling, because it is an incredibly tough profession. We need to get the media to look at the health of the profession, and provide good news stories and cases. I do not know whether anybody is watching "Damned", but it shows how hard the profession works, although it is made to be amusing. It would be nice if we could also have positive stories coming out in the media.

Our next recommendation was that the social work degree must continue to be generic to allow social workers a good foundation in all aspects of social work, so that they can get a good grasp of all the different aspects of looking after children in the care service. The content and the length of the degree course might be reviewed, to equip them with the right knowledge and skills for rewarding jobs—I believe that is in the Bill, too. That is beginning to happen. We also considered that the course should extend to four years, so that they have a year out in practice and get a good grasp of what they are getting themselves into.

Our next recommendation was that multi-agency training should be incorporated into the qualifying degree and should continue to be part of continuing professional development. In many professions, be it teaching or medicine, professional development is incredibly important. Social workers need that continued professional development and support throughout their career. We also recommended that the Department of Health and the Department responsible for children's services work with local authorities and other employers of social workers to ensure that resources, both course fees and replacement time, are available so that all social workers can undertake the level of post-qualifying education and training necessary for the roles and tasks they are employed to undertake. Again, that goes back to the point about continued development.

There should be a combination of a national recruitment campaign and local headhunting to encourage more people to enter social work. As we have heard, there are a lot of vacancies and social workers are incredibly

overworked. It is an incredibly rewarding profession and we need to ensure that we get more people into it, so we need a national recruitment campaign. One way of doing that is through high-impact advertising, similar to what we see for the Army, the police and teaching. We need it to send a clear message that the role of social workers is important in society and should be respected.

Another recommendation was for the establishment of the newly qualified social worker status, which is essential to supporting and retaining inexperienced social workers. Often they were coming out of university and going straight into work in harrowing circumstances and were not getting the support they needed. I hope we will also look at apprenticeships in social work. I know we are doing those in nursing and it would be great if that could extend to social work. Social workers need to have protected caseloads and guaranteed post-qualifying study and training time, so that we retain the social workers we already have. There also needs to be a flexible pay structure that corresponds to those of other similar professions working in multi-agency teams and that recognises the difference in living costs around the country.

We said that the numerical adoption targets and other targets that are not in the best interests of the child should be phased out, and I am pleased that has already been adopted. We also suggested that better targeted funding should go into research and development in social care.

Some of our recommendations have already been accepted, but this very good report is now nearly 10 years old, so if the Minister has not read it I insist that he does so. I ask him to look at anything that we have not done already, with a view to putting it into practice. I hope that the new regulator continues the improvement that has been happening in the social work profession. It is a tough job at the front-line but it is a very necessary and rewarding one. I look forward to seeing this Bill go into Committee.

6.34 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): As we have already said, Labour will not be dividing the House on this Bill this evening. However, I will take this opportunity to deliver some home truths to the Government. This is a Bill, which, from its very inception, has been ill-thought out and hastily put together without any guidance from children or from the very industry that it purports to be helping to improve. In short, it is a Bill about children and social work with negligible input from children and social workers. By not listening to the profession, the Government have once again shown how little value they see in using the professional experience and expertise of those who work, day in, day out, and often at the risk of their own welfare, to protect children and families.

What social workers want is to be out in the field with vulnerable children and families, because the more time they spend with them the more vulnerable children are identified and supported or saved from harm. It could not be simpler than that.

So far, the Government's social work reform agenda has been a total failure, rooted as it is in structural system change and in tinkering around with individual, mainly Labour-held, local authorities. *[Interruption.]* The Minister twists in his place, but he will get his turn

soon I am sure. There continues to be an obsession with adoption to the detriment of early intervention and work that can keep families together and children out of the care system. This Government are completely oblivious to the severe impact that their austerity measures and punitive welfare policies are having on our most vulnerable children and families. They are causing untold damage

I remind the Minister, as I have done many times before, that social work is a holistic profession. The Government's closure of Sure Start units and removal of early years help in family support centres, and the disproportionate cuts to local authorities in the most deprived areas have measurably taken their toll. All this Government seem to be doing for desperate families is turning the screw tighter and tighter, year on year, until they break. As other hon. Members have already said, the demand for help and protection is rising.

Over the past 10 years, there has been a 124% increase in serious cases—where a local authority believes that a child may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm—and the varied spending on social work has been found to be totally unrelated to quality. In short, all of the Government's initiatives and changes are not yielding positive results. This is systemic not local failure. In other words, it is the Government's fault.

Both the National Audit Office and the Education Committee looked into social work reform and noted that there are significant weaknesses in the Government's agenda, and that the reforms focus on

“changing structures potentially to the detriment of the people delivering this key public service.”

What the social work profession needs is continuity, stability and confidence, and a Government who can hold their nerve on how best to help children and families by putting in place and embedding good policies—policies such as the introduction of personal, social, health and economic education, which was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), and supported by the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller).

The Government are failing to get the basics right. They are not reducing social worker caseloads, preventing experienced professionals from quitting the profession or training social workers in a holistic way—they are fast-tracking them, and forcing them to specialise before they have even been trained in the basics. The Government are not amending IT and the bureaucratic process across the board to achieve the goal of getting social workers where they want to be, which is out from behind their desks and seeing the families with whom they work. This Bill does nothing to respond to the crisis in social work and to the hundreds of thousands of children who need better services right now.

Like other Members, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Labour Lords and other peers whose tireless work has resulted in the Bill before us today being markedly different from that which was first introduced. In particular, I wish to congratulate peers on defeating the Government and forcing them to remove dangerous clauses from the Bill that would have paved the way for the privatisation of children's social care. It is scandalous that these clauses are soon to reappear at Committee stage. The Government's proposals will allow local authorities, under the guise of innovation, to opt out of protective primary legislation. That legislation,

[Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck]

which has taken decades to achieve, has led to us having one of the safest child protection systems in the world. It was hard fought for by the profession in this place and in the other place. These proposals have caused alarm and outrage in the profession and the sector overall. I have yet to meet a social worker who supports the changes. I have had no clarity from the Minister about where the demand for change has come from and what pieces of primary legislation local authorities and social workers say prevent them from carrying out good social work. Will he tell us today?

This is legislation formed in the worst possible way, without demand and without any evidential basis for fixing the problems it purports to fix. The Government have invented a solution to an invented problem, because the Bill will not solve any of the problems in social work. What I know from my time in social work practice is that the things that social workers find restrictive, such as case recording, derive from secondary legislation, guidance, or the custom and practice in their particular local authority—all of which can be changed without primary legislation.

The Government have denied time and again that the opt-out clauses were about privatisation, yet late last week, two years after it was written and after an inexplicable delay in responding to freedom of information requests, the Department for Education released a report, referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), which sets out how children's social care can be moved out of local authority control—a report which states that independent contractors have said that they are willing to play the long game and wait for councils to hand over the majority, if not all, of their children's social care services after they have developed their experience in children and families social work. There we have it—independent contractors are going to use vulnerable children and families to experiment with, once the Government allow local authorities to opt out of protective legislation. These are the most dangerous changes to child protection that I have ever seen.

Labour, bolstered by the support of the profession and related stakeholders who have expressed outrage at these plans, will fight the Government every step of the way on these clauses. Vulnerable children are not to be used as market experiments, and any child protection strategy that requires the dispensation of the law to achieve it is counter-productive and downright dangerous.

Of course, there are parts of the Bill that we can support. The introduction of detailed principles of corporate parenting, the extension of the personal adviser role to care leavers up to the age of 25, and the local offer for care leavers are all steps in the right direction. Our concern is whether the Government can deliver it. For example, they promise in the Bill to promote the physical and mental health of looked-after children, but on their watch child and adolescent mental health services are in meltdown, with many looked-after children waiting not just months, but years, for specialist help. Changes need to be properly resourced, otherwise they are warm words and nothing more, so can the Minister confirm that these proposals will be properly resourced?

The Bill establishes a new social work regulator. In Committee we will carefully consider this change and those that relate to local safeguarding boards and the

child safeguarding practice review panel. We share some of the concerns of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). We have ongoing concerns about the independence and impact of the proposed non-departmental public body model, especially the lack of detail in the current proposals which envisage Government appointments directly to the leadership of the organisation. Can the Minister please explain why the social work profession is treated so differently from other health and care professions?

Finally, the Bill is impotent in its response to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. These children are experiencing the most immense suffering and trauma. Thanks to Lord Dubs forcing the Government's hand and reminding them of this crisis, we will see a strategy in May next year, but these are urgent and pressing matters and deserve further debate in this place. We fully support the amendments so eloquently and passionately outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow.

In essence, what we have here is a Bill with some nice-sounding elements that do not appear to be fully resourced, and are therefore not guaranteed, and the continual threat to open up children's social care to the market by allowing opt-outs from legislation. In fact, we will be presented with a Bill in Committee that local authorities could, in theory, dispense with if it became law. That is a completely ridiculous approach to legislation and an insult to the House.

I know that getting things right for children and families in the social work arena is not an easy task—it is difficult and complex, and many Governments have grappled with it. But trust me, this Bill is not the answer. We will seek significant amendments in Committee and make sure that the Government understand that privatisation and micromanagement are not the answer to every problem. Labour will never allow the Government to use our most vulnerable children as experiments in Tory ideology.

6.45 pm

The Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families (Edward Timpson): I begin by thanking hon. Members for their enthusiastic engagement with the issues at the heart of the Bill. We all share a commitment to improving the lives of our most vulnerable children, and that has been demonstrated by the energy shown throughout this debate. As we enter Committee, I look forward to exploring in much more detail aspects of the Bill that have been raised today.

As the Minister for School Standards set out in opening the debate, protecting our most vulnerable children and giving them the care and support they need to thrive is one of the Government's most important responsibilities. The children who need support from social care services have often faced challenges that most of us can only ever imagine. They have disabilities, they have faced abuse and neglect, or they have been let down time and again by the people who are supposed to love and protect them. They may be being exploited by perpetrators preying on their vulnerability. Children's social care professionals deal with these highly complex and demanding challenges every day. They step up and take on responsibility for protecting our vulnerable children.

In my time as children's Minister, as a family barrister and as a foster sibling, I have often been inspired by stories of children whose lives are transformed by social

workers, foster carers, residential care staff, adopters and others. These people epitomise the compassion and deep desire in our society to help others, without which we, and our children, would be so much the poorer.

The Bill we are debating today is a critical part of creating a children's social care system that enables those people to do the very best job possible for our children. It builds on the Children and Families Act 2014 and takes forward important measures from our overall strategy "Putting children first"—a strategy that I think represents the most fundamental reforms to the system in a generation.

The Bill places the interests of vulnerable children right at the heart of the social care system. It defines what good corporate parenting looks like, and secures the involvement of the whole council in looking out for children in or leaving its care. It requires every local area to set out exactly what support it is offering care leavers, and extends the help of a personal adviser to all care leavers up to the age of 25. It introduces improved national arrangements for analysing serious incidents and learning from them, and strengthened arrangements for local multi-agency co-ordination of safeguarding.

The Bill extends educational support to children leaving care via adoption or special guardianship. It creates the conditions for good placement decisions to be made for children coming into the care system, by ensuring that the child's long-term needs and the impact of the harm they have suffered are properly considered. Furthermore, it introduces a new, bespoke regulator for social work, Social Work England—an organisation that will be empowered to raise standards in social work and raise the status of that vital profession.

Members have raised a multitude of important points in today's debate, and I will do my very best to respond to them without detaining the House longer than would be deemed acceptable. I am grateful for the constructive engagement of Members, and want to work together to move forward with these legislative provisions, which have huge potential to improve the life chances of the children we all care so deeply about.

The hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), the shadow Secretary of State, asked where our comprehensive strategy for all children in care was. We have it: it is the "Putting children first" document, and I urge her to refresh her memory of that all-encompassing strategy for children in care, which goes through to 2020.

The hon. Lady asked about spending on children's services. It is right to say that the pattern of inspection outcomes is not about how deprived an area is, the local geography or even the amount of money being spent on children's social care. Some of the local authorities judged inadequate by Ofsted this year were among the highest spending, while higher performers were found to spend their money more effectively, investing in the best services and bringing costs down. The key here is identifying where investment makes a difference, and spreading knowledge and practice about what works.

The hon. Lady asked about the local offer and about what guidance there would be for local authorities. The legislation already sets out the areas where local authorities should provide support: health and well being, education and training, employment, accommodation, participation in society, and relationships. We expect a wide range of services to be covered, from relevant universal health

provision, to careers advice, to specific financial support, which care leavers can access and will benefit from. We have also developed a prototype local offer that sets out the areas we expect local authorities to consider and that provides examples of more specific support a local authority may choose to offer, and I am happy to share that with the hon. Lady so that she can scrutinise it in more detail.

The hon. Lady asked about the independence of the new regulator—Social Work England. The Bill makes it clear that Social Work England will be a separate legal entity, with its own staff and set of responsibilities as a non-departmental public body. The Government have always been clear that they have no intention to make decisions about individual social workers, and that is reflected in the legislation.

The Chair of the Education Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), made some central points about the foundations of the Bill, which he welcomed, and that included the regulatory changes. He raised the issue of a professional body for social work, and I agree that it is absolutely important for the profession to have a strong body to represent it, to provide support and guidance, and to help it develop its own practice. I set out at the national children and adult social services conference a few weeks ago exactly how I want to work with the profession to make sure we come up with the right solution. We have tried a whole host of different ways of making these things work, and we now need to go further to make sure we have something that will endure long into the future.

My hon. Friend alluded to Trafford, one of the outstanding care-leaving services in England, and to the virtue of its having strong leadership. I agree with him, and I have been hugely impressed by the work that has been done there by Mark Riddell and his team. There is a lot they can show others in terms of what works.

The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) told us to look at the work in Scotland. I am always happy to look at the Scottish perspective. As ever, I invite her to look at what we are doing in England, too. She said Scotland has children at the heart of the system; so do we—if she looks at the "Putting children first" strategy document, she will see that. Although Scotland may lead the way in some areas, we lead the way in others—Staying Put being a good example.

The hon. Lady asked why local authorities are only to "have regard to" corporate parenting principles. The reason for that is that the local authority is the corporate parent and is legally responsible for looked-after children and care leavers. We believe that maintaining this clear accountability is right. There is an existing duty under section 10 of the Children Act 2004 in terms of who the key partners are, and they include health, police, education services and others. The intention is that the provisions will help to improve the response in terms of them carrying out the duties they already have set out in legislation.

The hon. Lady asked about the Government's commitment to the UN convention on the rights of the child. The Government remain fully committed to protecting children's rights and to the UNCRC. We have considered the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and we responded through the written ministerial statement published in October and through the permanent secretary's

[Edward Timpson]

letter to his counterparts across Government. The Bill is an example of how we constantly seek to not only protect children's rights but enhance them. A full child rights impact assessment was conducted during the development of the Bill. There was considerable debate in the Lords on this issue, and we recently reaffirmed our commitment, through the written ministerial statement, to reinforcing the message of the importance of the UNCRC across every Department and to making sure there is a proactive approach to considering children's rights in policy making.

I will do my utmost to address all the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). I do join him and my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) in praising the incredible work and dedication of our social work workforce—something that was reiterated by the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck). Children's and adults' social workers do a fantastic job, which is so difficult, day in, day out.

I agree that the administrative burdens on social workers—sitting in front of computers filling in forms—has hampered much of the progress of social work. I have read on several occasions the report, “No More Blame Game”, which my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham was instrumental in producing. The whole purpose of the changes we are making to the serious case review process is to get away from pointing the finger and to look at where things have gone wrong, why they have gone wrong and how we make sure that it does not happen again in future.

My hon. Friend set out some of the highlights of the Government's reform programme in children's social care over the past six years, mentioning Staying Put as one of those. I can inform him that there has been an exceptional response to this, with 54% of 18-year-olds, 30% of 19-year-olds and 16% of 20-year-olds now choosing to stay put. Of course, however, we keep the mechanism under review to ensure that it will continue to benefit more children and young people in future.

My hon. Friend talked about some of the deficiencies in the system, including in sharing best practice. Again, I agree. That is why we are setting up a What Works centre for children's social care that will build a robust evidence base, and disseminate learning about what does and does not work in children's social care practice, in order to help local practitioners and commissioners to employ the most cost-effective front-line practices to support children. Crucially, it will work closely with the child safeguarding practice review panel to ensure that practice developments identified through reviews are also widely disseminated.

On adoption, I share my hon. Friend's pride in the work of this Government to try to improve the adoption process for prospective adopters and, crucially, for children. The number of children being adopted has risen to over 5,000 per year, and they are being adopted more quickly. On the back of the Re B-S judgment, however, there has been a disappointing fall in those numbers, and we are seeking to do all we can to address that so that we do not lose the ground that we made up in the early years of this Government. Over 10,000 families have benefited directly from the adoption support fund, which was

also mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). Although we reluctantly had to put in a fair access limit in the short term to enable more families, where at all possible, to benefit from the fund, we want to try to find a sustainable solution so that we can continue this support in the long term. I am happy to meet my right hon. Friend to look at the particular case she raised, as it may exemplify some of the wider issues we need to look at in getting the decision right.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham asked whether the corporate parenting principles are additional to section 23 of the Children Act 1989. This is not about trying to put new duties on local authorities, as the duties are already very clearly set out. We are trying to engender a whole-council approach with councils taking responsibility for children and their care, and having regard to the principles in any decisions they make on their behalf.

Although we are extending the use of personal advisers, I concur with my hon. Friend that there is a whole range of quality and access for care leavers to personal advisers. That is why we are conducting a review of both those issues to make sure that the scope of what a personal adviser is there to do, and the types of people who become personal advisers, together with the training that they get, really matches the needs of care leavers in the way that they have told us they desperately want.

My hon. Friend raised some drafting issues and details around the additional support for education of children in care. I will look at that carefully, and I am sure we will address those issues in Committee.

On serious case reviews, I could not agree more with my hon. Friend about the need for transparency. We worked hard in opposition on the issue of their publication. I remember substituting for him on “Newsnight” to talk about this very subject. We now need to make sure that the new system reflects this important element of an approach that will provide us with a shining light on where practice has fallen short.

My hon. Friend asked about active participation in new local safeguarding arrangements, including financial contributions. That is an important part of the new system and we will set out in more detail, in guidance, how we expect to engender such an approach. He also made a clear pitch for where we should go next with the power to innovate. I will talk about that at the end of my speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) asked about cases of mothers who have repeat pregnancies. He should know that we will spend a total of about £11 million until 2020 on the Pause project, which has been extremely successful in trying to break that cycle, helping mothers find a different path through their lives and reducing the number of children coming into the care system.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) talked about the need to concentrate on prevention, which has to be at the heart of any decision about where money should be spent and where policy should be moving to. A number of other hon. Members also talked about sex and relationships education, and I will come to that subject towards the end of my speech.

On child refugees, the hon. Lady referred to my written statement on the safeguarding strategy across Government. I am grateful for her support for it, but she

queried how it sits alongside the Home Office guidance. I will look carefully at what she has said and talk to Home Office Ministers. The Home Office has published guidance setting out the eligibility criteria for children to be transferred to the UK from Calais. Those criteria are: all children aged 12 or under; all children referred to us by the French authorities who are assessed as being at high risk of sexual exploitation; and those nationalities most likely to qualify for refugee status in the UK aged 15 or under. As the Dubs amendment makes clear, children transferred should be refugees, and the best interests of the child are also established in every case as part of the process. The hon. Lady will appreciate that we have to have a method to ensure that those children who are at greatest risk are prioritised. I am happy to discuss the matter further with her, in conjunction with my colleagues at the Home Office.

Stella Creasy: Does the Minister acknowledge that that guidance explicitly sets out nationality before the best interests of the child and, further, that it identifies particular nationalities, thereby ignoring, for example, the Oromo and Afghan children who are currently in France, a third of whom have now gone missing because of the gap that it has caused? I appreciate the Minister's offer to look carefully at the situation, but will he look at it speedily as well, because we are very worried about those children in the run-up to Christmas and the cold in France?

Edward Timpson: I am happy to do that. Like the hon. Lady, I do not want to create conditions that are counterproductive to our shared mission. I will make sure that acknowledgment of the further work that needs to be done is as rapid as possible and that we progress in a way that does not create more difficulties, but that brings about positive solutions.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke mentioned the adoption case in her constituency. I am happy to discuss that further with her. We need to move to a more sustainable approach, but the adoption support fund has shown that there was a real need for that additional therapeutic support. As the Minister with responsibility for children, I am committed to doing what we can to continue to do that into the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) spoke of her enduring experience of many issues touched on by the Bill. In particular, she raised delays in the adoption process, and I agree with much of what she said. She will be pleased to know that the average time that it takes for a child to get through the adoption system has reduced to 18 months—a reduction of four months from its peak—but more work needs to be done, because every month that goes by is one that the child will never get back. More children are receiving that adoption support and I know that my hon. Friend will ensure that that message gets through to families in her own area who may not yet realise that it is available. She was also clear that the new provisions for care leavers are a major step forward, but I acknowledge that we need to make sure that social workers and personal advisers have the necessary tools to make the most of those changes.

I am grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South for our measures to improve the support for care leavers. She raised the issue of a national offer. I have met the relevant Minister

at the Department for Work and Pensions to see what further practical action we can take, and I will be able to allude to that in more detail in Committee. I take her point on social worker training, which is very much behind the work that we are doing on the assessment and accreditation process to make sure that we raise standards in social work wherever possible.

The hon. Member for South Shields and I get on very well, but I agreed with very little of what she had to offer this afternoon. She questioned the value that we place on the experience and expertise of social workers, but I have to say to her that that is exactly what this Bill is about. I ask her to look more widely at the work that the Government are doing, such as the innovation programme, where we have already spent more than £100 million. That money has gone directly to local authorities to test new ways of working, and there will be another £200 million up to 2020. That £300 million of value has been put directly into improving children's services.

When the hon. Lady started her speech, I felt as though she was determined to try to turn the debate into some sort of ideological struggle on many of the issues. I do not think she wanted to do that, but we seemed to be moving in that direction. I understand her desire to oppose and to be seen to oppose, but I hope that when we get into Committee, we can have a constructive debate about what is in the Bill and how it fits into the wider Government programme. I do not doubt that we have a shared desire to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. I have a pragmatic streak running through me; I am not some ideologue who will sit here and create a wall of noise. I want to hear the hon. Lady's argument, but I want her to hear mine, too.

The hon. Lady raised the LaingBuisson report, but I note that she failed to share with the House the official Government response to that report, which states that

"we disagree with the option in the report relating to the privatisation of children's social care services and we will not be implementing this option."

We could not be clearer about our position.

I want briefly to talk about the power to innovate, which has generated the most debate. Several hon. Members have raised questions about the power to innovate, a provision that was removed from the Bill in the other place, and which my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards referred to at the opening of the debate. We intend to revisit those powers, because of the important role that they stand to play in improving the quality of children's social care. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke for her support in explaining that new ways of working are a means of driving improvement in practice.

Whenever I visit local authorities and speak to front-line social workers—I am obviously not meeting the same ones as the hon. Member for South Shields—I am always struck by the passion, energy and dedication that they bring to their work. Too often, though, I leave with a message that, rather than helping them in their task, the structures and processes that we have put in place prevent social workers from using their professional judgement to truly respond to the needs of the children they look after.

As Professor Eileen Munro's landmark review of child protection told us, over-regulation can get in the way of social workers' ability to put children first.

[Edward Timpson]

The power will address that challenge, and it is being called for by local authorities around the country. It will give councils the ability to test new ways of working that are designed to improve outcomes for children in a safe and controlled environment, where the impact of removing a specific requirement can be measured and evaluated carefully.

That is not to say that important points have not been raised in the House and in the other place. I have considered them all carefully and I will continue to do so, and I will bring back a power with significant changes and additional safeguards that will, I hope, provide the reassurances that have been requested.

I want to be clear: we do not want to privatise protection services for children. We will not privatise child protection services. There are already clear legislative restrictions on the outsourcing of children's social care functions, and it was never our intention to use the power to innovate to revisit those. To put that beyond doubt, however, we tabled clarificatory amendments in the other place.

Neither will we remove fundamental rights or protections from children. Our aim is to strengthen, not to weaken, protections. My mission—since entering this House and before—has always been to improve the lives of vulnerable children. It is our job as a Government to create the conditions in which excellent practice can flourish. I am convinced that with proper safeguards in place, the ability to pilot new approaches will, in the long term, allow this House to enact more effective, evidence-based legislation and drive wider improvement for our most innovative practitioners and services across the system.

I agreed with Professor Eileen Munro when she said:

“I welcome the introduction of the power to innovate set out in the Children and Social Work Bill. This is a critical part of the journey set out in my Independent Review of Child Protection towards a child welfare system that reflects the complexity and diversity of children's needs.

Trusting professionals to use their judgement rather than be forced to follow unnecessary legal rules will help ensure children get the help they need, when they need it. Testing innovation in a controlled way to establish the consequences of the change...is a sensible and proportionate way forward.”

I ask hon. Members, before casting a final judgment on the power to innovate, to consider the amendments that we intend to table, which I believe provide that “sensible and proportionate” approach, built on the clear and single purpose of improving the outcomes of vulnerable children.

Finally, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke, my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud and the hon. Member for Walthamstow spoke powerfully about sex and relationships education. I, too, recognise its importance. Of course, the Government already issue statutory guidance on the teaching of sex and relationships, and have made funding available to improve the quality of that teaching. However, I have heard the call to go further in this area to build the resilience and confidence of children and young people in tackling what the modern world throws at them, not least online. This is, of course, a topic on which there are many, and strongly held, views and it will be important to look at those in the round, not least because PSHE and SRE are inextricably linked.

This matter is a priority for the Secretary of State, so I have already asked officials to advise me further on it, but I will ask them to accelerate that work so that I can report on our conclusions at a later point in the Bill's passage, when everyone in the House will be able to look at them and have their say.

I am sure that these reflections only start to do justice to the range of important issues we have debated here today. I look forward to picking up these matters in greater detail as the Bill moves into Committee. I see the contents of the Children and Social Work Bill as a major step forward in making sure that our most vulnerable children get the levels of support, protection and opportunity that any of us would want for our own children. I welcome the debate and challenge we have engaged in this afternoon—it helps to maintain the momentum behind what is a shared endeavour across these Houses. We are all united in our commitment to improving the lives of our most vulnerable children. Please let me leave the House in no doubt that I recognise and accept the challenges we face. This Government are more determined than ever to rise to those challenges, with our clear and ambitious plan for fundamentally reforming the system. Our vulnerable children deserve no less. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WORK BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Children and Social Work Bill [Lords]:

Committal

- (1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

- (2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 17 January 2017.

- (3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

- (4) Proceedings on Consideration and proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

- (5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

- (6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

- (7) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of any message from the Lords) may be programmed.—(*Andrew Griffiths.*)

Question agreed to.

CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WORK BILL [LORDS] (MONEY)

Question's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Children and Social Work Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by a Minister of the Crown, and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(*Andrew Griffiths.*)

Question agreed to.

CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WORK BILL [LORDS] (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Children and Social Work Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the charging of fees.—(*Andrew Griffiths.*)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

ADJOURNMENT (EASTER, MAY DAY AND WHITSUN)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25),

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 30 March 2017, do adjourn until Tuesday 18 April 2017; at its rising on Thursday 27 April 2017, do adjourn until Tuesday 2 May 2017; and at its rising on Thursday 25 May 2017, do adjourn until Monday 5 June 2017.—(*Andrew Griffiths.*)

Question agreed to.

DEFENCE COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Jim Shannon be discharged from the Defence Committee and Gavin Robinson be added.—(*Jackie Doyle-Price, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Ian Paisley and Gavin Robinson be discharged from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and Mr Gregory Campbell and Jim Shannon be added.—(*Jackie Doyle-Price, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Gill Furniss be discharged from the Women and Equalities Committee and Tracy Brabin be added.—(*Jackie Doyle-Price, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Terminal Illness: Support

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Andrew Griffiths.)

7.14 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): It is appropriate that this debate, on an issue that will touch millions of people and their families at some point in their lives, should take place today, given that 5 December has been designated International Volunteer Day by the United Nations since 1985. Its purpose is to “celebrate the power and potential of volunteerism”.

The UN states that IVD is

“an opportunity for volunteers, and volunteer organisations, to raise awareness of, and gain recognition for, the contribution they make to their communities”.

This year’s IVD theme of #GlobalApplause seeks to give volunteers around the world the recognition they deserve, while also “giving a hand” to potential volunteers by encouraging them to give up some of their time for others.

Of course, the link between IVD and this debate is that the vast majority of end-of-life palliative care outside hospital is provided by the charitable sector and only partly funded by the NHS. For that reason, people who donate their money to—and, crucially, their time through volunteering with—end-of-life-care charities play an immeasurably important role in ensuring that the majority of us, and our loved ones, will get the right care and support when we are dying. We will need more volunteers as more people die each year and the demand for high-quality palliative and end-of-life care increases, which is something I will return to later.

I have long been an advocate of the need for good palliative care and support to be available to those who need it, but it is as a result of my recent work locally with the charity Marie Curie that I sought this debate. As I am sure all hon. Members will know, Marie Curie has been providing care and support for people living with terminal illness and their families for the last 65 years. It was able to care for more than 40,000 people across the UK in the last year alone, in large part thanks to the support of more than 10,000 volunteers.

In October, I had the absolute privilege of meeting my constituent Don Lowther, who has terminal cancer, and Faye Morrison, a 21-year-old student from Gateshead who has befriended Don through Marie Curie’s helper service. This pioneering service, which has been available in the Tyne and Wear area since last year, matches trained volunteers with people living with terminal illnesses, providing them and their loved ones with companionship, emotional support and practical help with the aim of ensuring that their quality of life is the best it can be in its final stages.

Since last December, Faye has been making regular visits to see Don in his home, and over that time they have developed a close friendship. Faye is able to ensure that Don, who can no longer drive, can still get out of the house to places such as North Shields for fish and chips. Perhaps most importantly, Faye is a non-family member who Don can talk to and share his concerns with. The impact of Faye’s volunteering on Don’s quality of life, and that of his wife’s, is clear to anyone who

[Catherine McKinnell]

meets them, but Faye is the first to say that she has—from giving her time and being part of the helper service—gained as much as Don has.

The Marie Curie helper service also helps to co-ordinate local services, enabling people affected by a terminal illness and their families to understand what is happening, and ensuring that they are supported throughout this challenging journey. In the case of Faye and Don, this has involved signposting Don to the services provided by Marie Curie's Newcastle hospice, which I also heard more about from Lead Nurse Michelle Scott when I recently visited this facility, which is located in the west end of the city in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah).

I saw for myself the newly opened complementary therapy and relaxation area, with its Alnwick garden theme, and the different types of accommodation available to patients and their carers, including for respite care. I learned more about the wide range of medical and nursing care, physiotherapy and occupational therapy available, and about the practical, psychological, emotional and spiritual support provided by the highly experienced hospice team. What I took away most from my visit, however, was the hospice's absolute dedication to celebrating life and to ensuring that those using its services—whether terminally ill parents with young children or those, such as my constituent Don, who use their day services and activities—receive the best possible support and enjoy the best possible quality of life as their time comes to an end. Don told me he was concerned that once he stepped inside the hospice, he would never leave, but that is just not the case. Thanks to the helper service and Faye, he was signposted to the care and support provided at all stages of terminal illness. That support is not negative about death and dying, but treats them as a part of life. Of course, not all Marie Curie's nursing care takes place in a hospice setting, because the charity's nurses also provide overnight care in people's own homes.

Marie Curie is certainly not the only charitable organisation providing end-of-life care in the Newcastle area. Other vital organisations include Macmillan Cancer Support, with whom I recently had the pleasure of enjoying coffee and cake at the Lemington Centre and St Cuthbert's Primary School in Walbottle, as well as St Oswald's hospice in Gosforth, which has worked to

“make the most of time and improve quality of life for everyone in the North East living with an incurable condition, and their families”

for the past 30 years.

Despite the incredible efforts of these charities and the NHS for people who are dying, the risk that they will not get the care that they need to manage their symptoms and to maintain their quality of life until the end of their life is worryingly high. Research undertaken last year by the London School of Economics on behalf of Marie Curie found that a deeply concerning 92,000 people who need palliative care in England each year are not receiving it. That means that one in four people are not getting the good end-of-life care—care for managing pain and other symptoms, alongside psychological, social and spiritual support—that they clearly need.

The people who miss out most frequently on this support are those with a terminal illness other than cancer, such as heart failure or chronic pulmonary disease. Indeed, written evidence submitted by the National Council for Palliative Care to the Health Committee's inquiry into end-of-life care, which was published last year, drew attention to the fact that people with cancer access over 75% of specialist palliative care services, although cancer causes around 30% of all deaths. Concerns about the availability of palliative care for people with non-cancer diagnoses have been raised with me by a constituent living with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.

Others who are likely to miss out are people aged over 85, including those with dementia, despite the fact that dementia is now identified as the leading cause of death in England and Wales. Written evidence submitted by Age UK to the same Health Committee inquiry highlighted that while one third of all deaths are of people aged over 85, only around 15% of the people who gain access to specialist palliative care fall into that age group. Worrying inequalities already exist regarding the quality of end-of-life support available, depending on a person's illness, age and, as ever, where they happen to live.

A growing concern is that the existing system, which is already unable to provide care for all who need it, is coming under ever greater pressure as our social care services fast approach breaking point. Marie Curie states that in its own services, it is seeing people waiting weeks in hospitals and hospices for social care packages to be put in place so that they can get home or into a care home to spend their final days in the place of their choosing. Very sadly, that situation means that it is not uncommon for people to die while waiting. This does, of course, have a terrible human impact, not only on the person dying, but on their families, making what is already a hugely traumatic situation immeasurably worse. This state of affairs is also totally cost-inefficient for our NHS, which could be using those hospital beds for people who need acute care.

The situation I have outlined will come as no surprise to any hon. Member, given that adult social care budgets have been cut by some £4.6 billion, or 31% in real terms, since 2011. They continue to fall in the face of an increasingly elderly population and therefore increasing demand. I have no doubt that the Minister will want to champion the social care council tax precept that the Government have allowed local authorities to raise for this purpose, but I gently remind him that that is anticipated to raise £1.4 million a year in Newcastle, yet the city council faces a social care shortfall of some £15 million.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this issue to the House's attention. She is making a powerful speech. Let me also pay tribute to the hospices in my constituency—St Peter's hospice, and the hospice that cared for my father and my mother-in-law in their dying days.

Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the fact that the Government have not made adequate progress in meeting the recommendations of last year's inquiry into end-of-life care by the Health Committee? Will she join me in asking the Minister to explore the question of how well the five principles of end-of-life care are being followed across the country?

Catherine McKinnell: I think that we would all like the Minister to try to explain that key point. Marie Curie's main concern, which I know is shared throughout the sector, is that the provision of palliative care is simply not growing to meet the demand for services. That is clearly extremely troubling, given that one in four people are already unable to access the end-of-life care and support that they need. Like the rest of our health and social care services, the palliative and end-of-life care sector—including those who provide such care in hospitals and care homes—is facing a demographic crisis. More people are dying each year, at an older age, and with more long-term and often complex conditions. Indeed, the number of deaths per year will rise by 100,000 over the next five years.

Given those facts, when the Government announced in July this year in their

“response to the independent review of choice in end of life care”

that they would establish a board within NHS England to implement the recommendations of the review, it came as a grave disappointment to all involved in the sector that they had chosen to reject the review's key recommendation that £130 million of funding should be made available at the next spending review to

“invest in social care and NHS-commissioned services, to deliver a national choice offer in end of life care.”

Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) and, I am sure, others who are listening to the debate, I ask the Minister to state clearly how, without the additional funding that was recommended by the independent review, the Government will ensure that palliative and social care services grow to meet existing and increased demand in the coming years.

Thangam Debbonaire: Does my hon. Friend agree that the autumn statement provided an ideal opportunity for the Government to produce sums to meet the ever-increasing demand for social and end-of-life care, and that that opportunity was missed?

Catherine McKinnell: That is a good point. Everyone was disappointed not to hear a commitment from the Government. I think we would all like to know how, without those additional funds, the Government will end the distressing and unacceptable circumstances in which 92,000 people—one in four—are missing out each year on the care and support that they and their families need at the end of their lives, and how on earth the Government will prevent that deeply concerning figure from growing ever bigger.

I am acutely conscious that there are many more issues that I could have raised in a debate about such an important issue. They include the provision of end-of-life care for children and young people with life-shortening conditions, which, according to the charity Together for Short Lives, is often

“inappropriately coupled with the palliative care needs of adults, when their needs can be much more complex”.

A key concern for that charity, and for all of us, is that the number of children and young people affected by life-shortening conditions is not properly monitored, which makes it impossible for the Government, the NHS and local authorities to plan properly and budget for their needs.

Another serious issue relates to the fact that our welfare system can let down too many people with debilitating and terminal conditions such as motor neurone disease. While welcoming the recent and long overdue announcement that people with severe lifetime conditions will no longer have to undergo reassessments for employment and support allowance, the Motor Neurone Disease Association and many other charities remain extremely concerned about the Government's determination to devolve attendance allowance to local authorities, and the impact that that could have on the vital support that people with extremely challenging conditions currently receive.

I have raised a number of issues with the Minister this evening about the additional funds for end-of-life care that the NHS, charities and their much-needed volunteers clearly need. When people do not have the palliative care that they need, there are real and damaging consequences. They may die in pain or discomfort, which causes distress not just to them, but to their families, friends and loved ones. That will be avoidable if the Government can make a commitment to those people. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to the important concerns that I have outlined this evening.

7.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on bringing this debate to the House. This is an important subject and it is good that we have the chance to talk about it.

It is also good, as the hon. Lady said, that we are debating it on the UN's International Volunteer Day. She reminded the House, if it needed reminding, how much of the palliative care burden is taken up by volunteers. We should all reflect on the fact that there are 6 million informal carers in this country. Without those people, things would be much more difficult. We have a carers strategy coming out in the next few months, which I will discuss during my speech.

The hon. Lady talked about her hospice, the work that the Marie Curie charity does there and the helper service it has pioneered in Newcastle. I am happy to acknowledge the fantastic work that hospices do. I have one in my constituency, St Rocco's, which also does brilliant work. The hon. Lady used a good phrase: we should recognise that at their best hospices celebrate life. That is important.

The Government's position is that high-quality, end-of-life care, reflecting individual needs, choices and preferences, should be available to everyone. That is our objective; that is what we are working to achieve. Much is being done, despite perhaps the tone of the hon. Lady's remarks. However, of course there is more to do: more can always be done. This is not something that will ever be finished, but I want to set the context in which we are working.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister has rightly acknowledged, as has the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), the importance of charities and the work that they do. In his response to the points that she has made, will he say what the Government intend to do for young carers

[Jim Shannon]

who look after those who are at the end of life? I am aware of the pressure on those young carers given their age, and their ability to cope with the life-changing event that will happen to them and their family very shortly. We need something for them, Minister. Can I make a plea for them?

David Mowat: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. He is right. There are about a quarter of a million informal carers under the age of 25, half of whom are under the 16-to-18 age range. There are issues for education and future employment. The carers strategy is addressing that and I will have more to say about that.

On the context, 480,000 people in England die every year. Thirty-six per cent. of those are over 85 and about 350,000 of those deaths are expected, in the sense that they are not a surprise. Roughly half that number get some specialist palliative care as part of the pathway. The hon. Lady talked about that not being enough, and I will come back to that. Forty-seven per cent. die in hospital, which is an improvement: 57% of people were dying in hospital 10 years ago. There is an emphasis—the charities, particularly Macmillan, are offering a lead on this—on ensuring that fewer people die in hospital.

In terms of authoritative evidence of how that is working—the hon. Lady mentioned some of the points made by Marie Curie—the Office for National Statistics conducts a yearly survey called “Bereaved VOICES”, which looks at how carers and bereaved people evaluate the last three months of the end-of-life care for their loved ones. About 75% of those services are regarded as good, excellent or outstanding. Ten per cent. are regarded as poor. Ten per cent. is 48,000 deaths a year, and that is still too high. Nevertheless, 75% of those services are regarded as good, excellent or outstanding. The highest proportion of those services are in hospices. Care homes rated about the same as hospices, with hospitals doing less well. The figures are patchy, however, and that is generally linked to deprivation. They are not as good in areas of relatively high deprivation as they are in other areas. That is partly because hospice availability is somewhat skewed by the fact that the charities that run them tend to operate in more affluent areas.

The hon. Lady mentioned the need for spiritual and emotional attention at the end of life, and I can tell her that 70% of those who responded to the survey regarded their loved ones as having received good or outstanding spiritual or emotional care. That reflects well on those in the voluntary sector and the NHS who provide that care, and we should acknowledge that.

I do not wish to sound complacent, because I acknowledge that things could and should be better. I have had this job for four or five months, and there are very few of the areas I cover in which the UK could be said to be the best in the world. Let us take cancer outcomes as an example. We know that our one-year survival rates for most types of cancer are worse than those of most other countries in Europe. Last year, however, the Economist Intelligence Unit compiled a quality of death index, which evaluated 50 or 60 countries in the world against a number of criteria, and the UK came top in end-of-life care. As I have said, I do not know the situation across all the areas for which I am responsible, but we should acknowledge this finding. To put it into context, Germany came seventh, France came 10th and

Sweden came 16th. That has been achieved through the work of people in charities and in the NHS, but we must also acknowledge that things could be better.

The hon. Lady spoke about social care funding—although that is a slightly different area—and about delayed transfers of care and all that results from them. I have acknowledged many times in the Chamber that social care funding is under pressure and that that can cause delayed transfers of care, or bed-blocking, if we want to use that term. However, in terms of adult social care, if we compare the top 10% of councils with the bottom 10%, we see that there is a factor of 30 times in the difference between their performance in delayed transfers of care. That is not related to budgets; it is related to best practice, leadership and all that goes with that. We are sometimes quick to say that money is always the issue, but although that is of course part of it, it is not the only issue. It is important to understand that other factors are involved. Among other areas that need to be improved, we need to continue our drive to ensure that more people do not receive their end-of-life care in hospitals, where they generally do not wish to be. We should also acknowledge that there can be non-uniform commissioning among clinical commissioning groups, and we can do better in that regard as well.

The hon. Lady talked about the choice review, which was produced in 2014 by the National Council for Palliative Care, helped by Macmillan and Marie Curie. It contained some 62 recommendations. The Government’s response came out in July—it was one of the last acts of my predecessor—in the form of a five-point charter. In it, we accepted that we would have personalised care plans in place by 2020, that everyone was entitled to an honest discussion about their end-of-life care and to support in making informed choices, that family and carers would be involved in those choices, and that all people going through an end-of-life process would have an identified contact at all times.

Those elements will need to be implemented right across NHS processes, technologies and pathways, and we have set up the end-of-life care board under Bruce Keogh, the chief medical officer, to oversee that. All arm’s length bodies will be represented on the board. This has not yet been published—it is my role to ensure that it is—but the requirement now is to turn the commitments in the review response into tangible milestones, deliverables and responsibilities. I recently met several members of the End of Life Care Coalition and undertook to have a transparent process so that between 2016 and 2020 we know what we are implementing and when and how that is being done. It is important that that happens. We are extremely committed to it—it is a Government priority. We could do things better as a country, but we do pretty well and we need to do this to make things even better.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Minister for his responses to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell). On that point about the plan for between 2016 and 2020, given that the last days of someone’s life are etched into the memories of those who are left behind—I can remember every single moment of the day 23 years ago yesterday when I lost my father—will the Minister commit to report back to the House at various points over that four-year period, or will he report on progress in other ways?

David Mowat: That is a very reasonable request. That intervention was not quite what I was expecting, but it is entirely reasonable and I will commit to do that either in debates such as this or at Question Time, or whenever. I am unsure whether a statement would be appropriate, but it is a reasonable thing to request of a Minister and I am happy to do it. I will at least write to the hon. Lady on the process, because I am determined that the programme of work will be transparent and meaningful with clear deliverables that achieve what we need to achieve.

In addition to implementing the choice review, other ongoing and day-to-day work needs to happen. The Liverpool care pathway was pretty much supplanted last year by the five priorities for dying people that were mentioned in an earlier intervention. We are trying to embed those things within the structure of the NHS. They exist in training programmes, in Health Education England, and in the choices that people make when working in this sector. It is not rocket science; the priorities relate to sensitive communication, the need for individual plans covering food and drink, and also spiritual things for those who need or want them. Fundamental to all this—it should not really need saying—is that the dying person is involved in all aspects.

We put end-of-life care as a priority in the NHS mandate. Clinical commissioning groups must commission end-of-life and bereavement care, and there are NICE guidelines for that. That does not mean that it is not patchy, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North said, but those are the requirements. When the CQC evaluates care homes, hospitals and hospices, it specifically looks at end-of-life care, and those that want high rankings will need to address such things and work effectively.

I talked about milestones. One important initiative that I expect to come out of the choice review is electronic palliative care records, through which care plans are accessible to the many different workers who need access. I recently saw that happen in London, where the system is called “Coordinate My Care”. The idea is that if a person is in need of an ambulance or paramedic, the paramedic will have access to the care record on the way to the call-out. The record might explain that the person may not want to go to hospital, depending on the issue, and such decisions will become embedded in the process, which is important and good. I want that technology to be rolled out as quickly as possible.

Catherine McKinnell: I was concerned at the beginning of the Minister’s remarks that he sounded complacent about this issue, but he does certainly seem committed to making this review work over the next few years.

Will he just acknowledge that if the NHS is not able to get the support from the social care sector and is not able to utilise the funding required, it will fail in its efforts? It will fail unless the funding is there within the community sector and the NHS itself in order to achieve what the Minister sets out as a very important strategy going forward.

David Mowat: I am getting towards the end of my speaking time, so I will finish by answering that as best I can. Of course money matters, and every process works better if there is plenty of money for it. The facts of the matter are that both adult social care and the NHS are under cost pressures. To be honest, that will always be the case in every system, and I just gently say to the hon. Lady that she may be surprised to know that we spend about a third more on adult social care, which is a particular responsibility of mine, than either France or Germany.

Catherine McKinnell: The Minister acknowledged that the challenge in addressing this issue properly is often the patchwork nature of services in our country and the postcode lottery. He also acknowledged that some of the areas that fare the worst are the most deprived, and they are also the areas facing the biggest cost pressures in terms of social care funding. Will he acknowledge that something needs to be done to ensure that that does not undermine these efforts?

David Mowat: This is not the autumn statement, and I cannot make commitments on funding other than to say that many Members on both sides of this Chamber would like to see, when the time is right, more funding for our vital public services. I again just gently make the point to the hon. Lady that we spend considerably more on adult social care than countries such as France and Germany, those it would be reasonable to compare us with, and it is not just about money in terms of the delayed transfers of care performance of different councils—it is hugely different.

Let us agree that what really is important is that over the next few years we implement the choice review: what is important is the Government’s commitment to implement that and our clear intent, as signalled by Bruce Keogh leading the implementation board, that we will be held accountable for it. I will be held accountable for it, and I will report back to the House in due course on that.

I thank the hon. Lady for raising this important issue.

Question put and agreed to.

7.47 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 5 December 2016

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

EU Energy Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman): The Energy Council is taking place in Brussels on 5 December. I will be representing the UK, and below are the agenda items to be discussed.

The Council will hold a policy debate on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning measures to safeguard the security of gas supply and repealing regulation (EU) No 994/2010. This will focus on possible alternative approaches for regional co-operation, exchange of information on commercial contracts and solidarity. The Council will consider the structure of core regions or groups of countries working together to address specific risks. The debate will also cover the role of competent authorities and the Commission in accessing contract information on security of supply issues and whether a solidarity mechanism should be harmonised or reflect member state specificities.

The Commission introduced the “winter package” on 30 November. As expected this is comprised of legislative proposals for the update of the energy efficiency, energy performance of buildings and renewable energy directives together with new legislative proposals on electricity market design and governance of the energy union.

The Commission will update the Council on progress on developing the external dimension of the EU energy policy. This will be followed by an exchange of views on whether progress has been made on strengthening the common voice of the EU in relations with partners beyond its borders; which countries or regions are the most relevant for the EU; and the tools to be used to enhance mutual cooperation. It will also cover how the EU should best approach the ongoing transformation of the global energy system, and respond to reform processes within international energy organisations.

The presidency will provide an update on the “state of play” on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council, setting a framework for energy efficiency labelling. This will focus on the delays in the trilogue negotiations between European Parliament, Council and the Commission.

The presidency will also provide a short “state of play” update on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing an information exchange mechanism with regard to intergovernmental agreements and non-binding instruments between member states and third countries in the field of energy.

The Commission will update the Council on recent developments in the field of external energy relations.

Finally, Malta will inform the Council of the priorities for their presidency in the first half of 2017.

[HCWS313]

CABINET OFFICE

Public Service Ombudsman Bill

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Skidmore): I am pleased today to publish the draft Public Service Ombudsman Bill.

The draft Bill sets out the Government’s plans for a new public service ombudsman. The Government want to make it as simple as possible for everyone to pursue a complaint about public services. The measures in this draft Bill will ensure that anyone who makes a justified complaint can expect a rapid, effective remedy and that their voice will be heard. The new body will provide simpler access to individuals who believe they have suffered injustice or hardship and to share the learning from failures to improve services for everyone.

The draft Bill would abolish the present parliamentary and health service ombudsman and the local government ombudsman and create a new organisation with strengthened governance and accountability. It would improve access to the ombudsman’s services by allowing for all complaints to be made with or without the help of a representative and in a variety of formats to meet the digital age. The draft Bill provides powers designed to allow the new ombudsman to work more effectively including an explicit role in championing improvements in complaints handling.

I am grateful for the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee for their work in championing an improved ombudsman service. I look forward to Parliament and the public’s consideration of our proposals.

[HCWS315]

TREASURY

Finance Bill 2017 (Draft Clauses)

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jane Ellison): The Government have consulted on a number of tax policies following announcements made at Budget 2016 and previously.

Today, the Government are publishing draft clauses for Finance Bill 2017, along with associated responses to consultations. This fulfils our objective to consult, where possible, on draft clauses for the Finance Bill at least three months in advance of the introduction of the Bill.

The Government will publish draft legislation for the following measures in January 2017:

Making Tax Digital

Social Investment Tax Relief

Clarification of tax treatment for partnerships

The remaining draft legislation for tax deductibility of corporate interest expense and loss relief reform will also be published in January 2017.

Further detail on the clauses published today can be found in the overview of legislation in draft, which includes corresponding tax information and impact notes. All publications will be available on the gov.uk website.

[HCWS320]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Hillsborough: Operation Resolve

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): Following the decision of Assistant Commissioner Jon Stoddart OBE to stand down as head of Operation Resolve on 5 September 2016, I am pleased to inform Parliament that I have appointed Assistant Commissioner Rob Beckley QPM as the head of Operation Resolve.

Operation Resolve, established in December 2012, is examining the full circumstances surrounding the planning and preparation for and the events on the day of the FA cup semi-final on 15 April 1989 at Hillsborough, Sheffield at which 96 Liverpool football club supporters died. It is an IPCC managed investigation, its terms of reference can be found at:

https://www.ipcc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/Hillsborough/Terms_of_Reference_Hillsborough_Managed_Inv_April2016.pdf

Rob Beckley has been appointed to the Metropolitan police as Assistant Commissioner to carry out the investigation. Most recently he was chief operating officer, College of Policing, retiring on 30 March 2016, having previously served in the Metropolitan Police Service, Thames Valley, Hertfordshire constabulary and Avon and Somerset police, where he was deputy chief constable.

[HCWS318]

Police Leadership

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): I am pleased to inform Parliament that Her Majesty the Queen has approved a two-year extension to the appointment of Craig Mackey QPM, Deputy Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

I recommended this extension to Her Majesty having had regard to a recommendation from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and a representation from the Mayor of London as occupant of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime.

My recommendation recognises the important contribution the deputy commissioner has made both nationally and to the Metropolitan Police Service as it has been undergoing a period of transformation.

The extension to 22 January 2019 provides stability for the Metropolitan Police Service and enables the deputy commissioner to continue to play a vital role in cutting crime and keeping Londoners safe.

[HCWS317]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

World Trade Organisation

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): The United Kingdom is a founding member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In addition to the general obligations of membership, all WTO members undertake specific commitments in their goods and services schedules: WTO members' goods schedules set out upper limits for tariffs and detail any tariff rate quotas, and WTO

members' services schedules set out commitments and reservations across all sectors and list specific sectoral commitments and reservations.

The UK's WTO commitments currently form part of the European Union's schedules. When we leave the EU we will need UK-specific schedules. In order to minimise disruption to global trade as we leave the EU, over the coming period the Government will prepare the necessary draft schedules which replicate as far as possible our current obligations. The Government will undertake this process in dialogue with the WTO membership. This work is a necessary part of our leaving the EU. It does not prejudice the outcome of the eventual UK-EU trading arrangements.

[HCWS316]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Employment Outcomes of Drug or Alcohol Addiction, and Obesity: Review

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Penny Mordaunt): Today I am publishing Professor Dame Carol Black's independent review into the impact on employment outcomes of drug or alcohol addiction, and obesity (Cm 9336). This fulfils a manifesto commitment.

Dame Carol makes 13 recommendations for Government intended to help improve the employment rates for those with drug or alcohol addiction, and obesity.

The review does not recommend addicts should be mandated to treatment, providing evidence that this would not improve employment outcomes, or meet legal or ethical concerns. The review makes clear recommendations for improving welfare and health services, building new evidence, and focusing on the role of employers—all with the aim of increasing job outcomes for people with addictions. There is a limited focus on obesity in the review, a reflection of the weak evidence that obesity directly causes unemployment.

The Government welcome the report and will carefully consider its findings. The Government are grateful to Dame Carol, and her team, for the hard work that has gone into this review.

[HCWS314]

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Opportunity and Integration

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): Dame Louise Casey has today released her report on how to boost opportunity and integration in isolated communities. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library of the House, and it is also available through my Department's website.

Dame Louise was commissioned to carry out her review by the then Prime Minister in July 2015. The review conducted through a combination of written consultation, visits and engagement across the country with members of the public and statutory agencies, round tables with academics, faith leaders and analysis of research and data. I am most grateful to Dame Louise for the thoroughness of her review and the comprehensive report.

This country has long been home to many different cultures and communities, but all of us have to be part of one British society. It is right that we celebrate the positive contribution that diverse groups make to British life, but we also need to recognise that more needs to be done to make sure nobody is excluded or left behind. To do that, we need to take a serious look at the evidence and must not shy away from the challenges we face. Dame Louise's report is a crucial step in that process, and I will be studying her findings very closely.

The report considers population change, patterns of residential and school segregation, social interactions between different groups in society, public attitudes and

values, social and economic exclusion, equality impacts of cultural and religious practices, hate and extremism, past approaches and the role of leadership. It concludes with a series of recommendations to Government for promoting integration that could be implemented as a new programme across Government.

I will carefully consider the findings in this review, in consultation with my Government colleagues and faith and community leaders, and will bring forward proposals in due course.

[HCWS319]

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 5 December 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
HOME DEPARTMENT	1	HOME DEPARTMENT—continued	
Asset Recovery Regime	9	Leaving the EU: Departmental Staff	16
Fraud	14	Police Forces	6
Freedom of Expression (Religious Satire)	13	Recorded Offences	12
Freedom of Movement	7	Terrorist Attacks	16
Illegal Migrants.....	15	Topical Questions	18
Immigration Detention/Adults at Risk Policy	13	Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children	11
Immigration Rules	4	Unskilled Migration: Employment Levels.....	1
Knife Crime	8	Violence against Women and Girls.....	17

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Monday 5 December 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL		HOME DEPARTMENT—continued	
STRATEGY	1WS	Police Leadership	3WS
EU Energy Council.....	1WS	INTERNATIONAL TRADE	3WS
CABINET OFFICE	2WS	World Trade Organisation.....	3WS
Public Service Ombudsman Bill	2WS	TREASURY	2WS
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ..	4WS	Finance Bill 2017 (Draft Clauses)	2WS
Opportunity and Integration.....	4WS	WORK AND PENSIONS	4WS
HOME DEPARTMENT	3WS	Employment Outcomes of Drug or Alcohol	
Hillsborough: Operation Resolve.....	3WS	Addition, and Obesity: Review	4WS

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned, and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Monday 12 December 2016**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Monday 5 December 2016

List of Government and Principal Officers of the House

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for the Home Department

New Member [Col. 25]

Southern Rail [Col. 26]
Answer to urgent question—(Paul Maynard)

Children and Social Work Bill [Lords] [Col. 36]
*Motion for Second Reading—(Mr. Gibb)—agreed to
Read a Second time*

Terminal Illness: Support [Col. 86]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 1WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
