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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 17 July 2017

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Speaker: Before we come to questions to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, I am sure the whole House will wish to join me in offering our congratulations to Britain's Jamie Murray, Jordanne Whiley, and Alfie Hewett and Gordon Reid on their successes respectively in the mixed doubles, the ladies' wheelchair doubles and the men's wheelchair doubles at Wimbledon. I am sure that colleagues will also wish to join me in offering our warmest congratulations to Roger Federer on his record-breaking eighth Wimbledon singles title, the oldest man to win the Wimbledon men's singles trophy in the open era, the oldest man to win a grand slam singles title since Ken Rosewall won in 1972 and the first man to win the Wimbledon title without dropping a set throughout the whole tournament since Björn Borg in 1976. We are celebrating the achievements of a very great man indeed.

Oral Answers to Questions

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Homelessness

1. **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): What progress his Department has made on plans to tackle homelessness. [900501]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): No one should find themselves without a roof over their head. That is why this Government have committed to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to eliminate it all together by 2027. We are implementing the most ambitious legislative reform in decades, ensuring that more people get the help they need before they face homelessness.

Alex Chalk: Our manifesto makes it clear that rough sleeping is unacceptable, and I am delighted that the Secretary of State shares my view that we should be demanding nothing less than its complete eradication. What is being done not only in England but in Cheltenham to end this stain on our society?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend cares very deeply about this issue and has done a lot in his constituency. I share those concerns and it is one of the reasons why, for example, we announced in our recent manifesto that we

will be piloting the concept of Housing First, which has worked well elsewhere. He will also know that his town of Cheltenham will receive £1 million of our £10 million social impact bond, money that will help the most vulnerable rough sleepers get the help they need.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State talked about homelessness as though it is people living on the street; in my constituency, the council is spending £35 million a year on people living in hostels and temporary accommodation, and there are many other hidden households who are living with another family because they cannot afford a roof over their head. The Secretary of State talks about his ambitious plans, but they do not help people here and now; what is he doing now to make sure that people in Hackney South and Shoreditch, across London and the country can get a roof over their head that is affordable?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady reminds us all that homelessness is much more than about people living on the streets; there are many more families and people affected across the country, including, of course, in London. One thing we are doing that I am sure she will welcome is the announcement in a recent Budget that we will be putting £100 million into low-cost move-on accommodation that will provide at least 2,000 places.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): First Point in my constituency works with many hundreds of my constituents who could be at risk of homelessness. Does my right hon. Friend think that housing associations should be doing more to refer individuals for support if arrears arise? That sometimes happens with larger housing associations, but smaller ones often fall short when it comes to referring constituents for support.

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend refers to how we can try to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place, and rightly says that some housing associations do a much better job with these types of referrals when arrears arise. There is also a better role for local authorities, and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will certainly help to achieve that.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Surely the Secretary of State must give some hope of a vision that this Government actually believe in something. And if he believes in one thing, it must be sorting out the social housing market by building homes for people at affordable rents—and good quality ones, too.

Sajid Javid: I know the hon. Gentleman cares passionately about this, but it is worth reminding him that statutory homelessness reached its peak in 2003 and since then has fallen to half that number. But, of course, more needs to be done, and the right type of social homes in the right places have a big role to play.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in commending the work of YMCA Black Country and its excellent chief executive, Steve Clay, as it works, through its Open Door programme, to persuade more private individuals to open their homes to homeless young people?

Sajid Javid: I will very much join my hon. Friend in commending the work that the YMCA does in his constituency, throughout the Black country and indeed throughout the country. This is a lesson that can be learned by many other areas, and it is exactly the kind of thing we want to look at and see whether we can do more of it.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister will be aware of the TV programme “Can’t Pay? We’ll Take It Away!”, in which officers arrive to evict people from their homes. Some of those people do not understand the High Court process and might not have paid their money, but some of them have paid their money and the High Court is unaware of that fact. What can be done to help those people at that last minute before the midnight hour?

Sajid Javid: I agree with my hon. Friend that more should be done in such difficult cases to help those vulnerable people. I know that some councils do a much better job than others in that regard, and I hope that the work we are now doing as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act will help us to spread that good practice to more councils.

Grenfell Tower Fire: Advice to Landlords

2. **Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): What advice his Department has provided to small private landlords since the Grenfell Tower fire. [900502]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): The safety of tower block residents is absolutely paramount. We have made our testing process available to private residential owners free of charge. This means that landlords can check the safety of their buildings and take the necessary action to reassure residents that they are safe in their homes.

Mike Kane: The Residential Landlords Association, which is based in my constituency, has raised concerns about the complex and sometimes contradictory guidance being given to private landlords by various bodies, including the Government, on fire safety. What plans does the Secretary of State have to address this matter?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman will understand that, in the wake of the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, the Government had to move quickly and issue guidance within days. Much of that guidance was continuously updated as we were made aware of new information. I met representatives of the private sector on 6 July, and we are discussing with them what more we can do.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that it was this Government who introduced the requirement for private landlords to fit smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors in private homes, and that we are introducing electrical safety checks as standard later this year? Does he acknowledge that all landlords have an overriding responsibility to make their properties safe for their tenants?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend reminds us that it is the legal responsibility of all landlords, whether in the private or public sector, to ensure that their properties

are safe for all their tenants. I think that he was also implying that, in the wake of the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, we should be looking at what more can be done.

17. [900518] **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I am concerned that a survey of social landlords carried out by HouseMark has found that they had little confidence that they would be able to take enforcement action under the Housing Act 2004 to ensure that leaseholders complied with fire safety regulations, including through fitting fire doors, which is obviously essential, given what the Secretary of State has just said about keeping all tenants safe. Will he respond to the request from Nottingham City Council, which is seeking additional powers to enable this to happen?

Sajid Javid: That is an important issue and I will certainly look carefully at that request. It is important that all leaseholders recognise their responsibilities as legal owners of their properties. A number of towers were evacuated in Camden recently and a lot was found to be wrong with the internal fire safety of the buildings, including fire doors that should have been in place but simply were not.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I have pointed out to the mayor of Birmingham that the home in which he lives in Birmingham is in a block that is clad. Does the Department keep a register so that it can push out information to private landlords on what they should be looking for, specifically in relation to cladding?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend will know that the legal owners of the building, be they private landlords or otherwise, will have the best information about what type of cladding may or may not exist. Soon after the Grenfell Tower tragedy, after getting expert opinion, we swiftly issued guidance on how to handle that identification process better.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): Could the Secretary of State be more specific about the financial help that he is going to make available to councils with tower blocks, such as Southwark, which has 174? He has talked about the legal duties of councils to keep their tenants safe, and of course that is very important, but they also have a legal duty to have a balanced budget. Since the Conservatives came into government in 2010, Southwark Council’s budget has nearly halved. Fire improvements such as the installation of sprinklers should not happen at the expense of other improvements that tenants are waiting for; nor should the expense be placed on leaseholders. Will the Secretary of State come up with the £100 million that Southwark needs?

Sajid Javid: We have been very clear to local authorities and housing associations in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy that they should carry out checks immediately. They should then consult with their local fire and rescue service, and whatever is recommended should absolutely be put in place. Where local authorities cannot afford that, we are happy to talk to them and to provide the support that they need.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): In the five weeks since the Grenfell Tower tragedy, both private and social landlords have met with an array of bewildering and

sometimes contradictory advice. They look to the Department for Communities and Local Government both for technical advice about acceptable specification and for real advice about what the Department will pay for. When is the Secretary of State going to make it clear to those responsible for tower blocks what is the right thing to do and how they will pay for the necessary improvements?

Sajid Javid: First, the hon. Gentleman is right about looking to the Department, among others, for advice. That is one reason why we set up an independent expert panel to provide more of that advice that can be relied on. Secondly, the Government have made their position clear on funding: there is no need to wait. If any necessary work has been identified, local authorities must get on with it, and where they cannot afford it they should approach us.

Housebuilding

3. **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of the current level of housebuilding. [900503]

11. **Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of the current level of housebuilding. [900512]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): The level of housebuilding has not been matched by demand. Radical reform is needed to build new homes now and in the future. Our housing White Paper set out how we intend to do that and turn around a legacy of decades of not building enough homes.

Mr Speaker: I think the right hon. Gentleman meant it the other way around—that supply had not matched the demand. I think that that is what he meant.

Sajid Javid: I beg your pardon, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.

Scott Mann: The Secretary of State will be aware that Cornwall recently received £5 million for community-led self-build housing. Does he support neighbourhood plans that look to provide that facility instead of registered social landlord properties, so that Government Members can give people not only the ladder, but the spade, the spirit level and the trowel, too?

Sajid Javid: As you say, Mr Speaker, supply has not met demand, and one way of getting that right is to have more self-build homes. I understand that some 255 people have registered in Cornwall Council's area, and the Homes and Communities Agency is working with igloo Regeneration to deliver 54 plots at Heartlands for people in Cornwall. Our recent announcement of the home building fund—£3 billion in total—can also help.

Lucy Allan: Telford is a new town that is about to celebrate its 50th anniversary, and it is playing its part in tackling the national housing shortage, so I am delighted that the housing infrastructure fund has been announced

to encourage new build. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the fund will also accept bids for the regeneration and renewal of new town infrastructure?

Sajid Javid: As we have shown in the housing infrastructure fund's prospectus, we have deliberately given infrastructure a broad definition, so we would welcome bids that would support regeneration. She is absolutely right to highlight that infrastructure is often the missing bit where we need new homes, which is exactly why we launched the fund.

15. [900516] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Numbers matter, but so does the quality of new homes. I am sure that the Secretary of State will have seen some of the terrible stories in the national press, and I have seen some awful examples recently in my constituency. Why is it that someone can buy goods in a shop and have powers of redress, but if someone spends a fortune on a new home, they can sometimes struggle for months, if not years, to get what they paid for?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the issue of ensuring that if things go wrong, as they sometimes do, when people buy new homes, owners do get proper redress. Mechanisms are in place, both in the private sector and through statutory means, but the issue needs to be looked at carefully.

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): I would be grateful if the Secretary of State could confirm why the number of affordable homes built in the last year fell to the lowest level in 24 years.

Sajid Javid: I can happily tell the hon. Lady that the number of council houses built in the last six years is more than double what was built in the previous 13 years. Council houses offer an important choice to people in terms of affordability. We have seen almost 900,000 homes built since 2010, of which more than 300,000 are affordable homes.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State congratulate Exeter's Labour council on building more council homes and housing association homes in the last 10 years than all the surrounding Conservative districts put together? What more can he do to encourage those rural councils to provide more homes in their market towns and villages, instead of plonking their developments on the edge of cities such as Exeter in unsustainable urban sprawl?

Sajid Javid: I would like to see all councils playing an active role in getting more homes built in their area. It is to be welcomed when councils work with private partners to deliver more homes themselves. To make sure those homes are in the right place, local people should be involved in formulating the local plan and then the neighbourhood plans.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Balancing supply and demand requires successful developers and confident buyers. Will my right hon. Friend bring in the owners of the freeholds, who are making a misery of the lives of people in leasehold houses, and the developers who are trying to put things right? People such as Adriatic, frankly, look like modern-day robbers.

Sajid Javid: I commend my hon. Friend for his work in this area to show up the leasehold abuses that take place, especially when it comes to buying new houses. He will know that we said in the White Paper that we will be bringing forward proposals, and I can confirm to him that we will be doing so very shortly.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): The Prime Minister has blamed weak housing policy for the Government doing so badly at the election and, now, a Government official speaking for the Secretary of State said the same thing yesterday, but blaming “selfish” Conservative councils who are not telling the truth about housing needs in their area. Is it not the truth that this is a desperate bid to shift the blame from the Secretary of State, who is failing on all fronts on housing? With affordable housebuilding now at a 24-year low, will he change tack and back Labour’s plan to build 100,000 new genuinely affordable homes? He can even offer it to the Prime Minister, and we will back him to see it through this House.

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Gentleman wants to know the truth, and the truth is that, when he was Housing Minister at the end of the last Labour Government, housing starts fell to their lowest level in almost 100 years—that is the truth. Since then, new-build housing starts are at a nine-year high. If he supports us on implementing the housing White Paper, we can work together.

Core Cities: Economic Regeneration

4. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What support his Department is giving to the Core Cities to promote economic regeneration. [900504]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): All Core Cities have benefited from city deals. Areas covering five Core Cities, including Bristol, have also agreed devolution deals, which provide funding powers and support economic growth for regeneration.

Kerry McCarthy: The Core Cities are responsible not just for 19 million people and a quarter of the UK’s economy but for 29% of our trade exports, yet the Department for Exiting the European Union has not made any approach to the Core Cities to discuss how they can be represented during the Brexit negotiations. Will the Minister have words with his colleagues in that Department and tell them that they really ought to be talking to our cities?

Jake Berry: Looking at the list of Core Cities, I have lived in two and worked in one, so I know a bit about them. All I can say is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has written to all Core Cities that have a mayor to say that he will meet them over the summer.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): We should be proud of the funding for our Core Cities, particularly through the devolution deals, but regeneration in the north also relies on the funding of our non-Core Cities. An important part of that for communities such as Hull has been coastal communities funding. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government remain committed to coastal communities funding?

Jake Berry: I can confirm to my hon. Friend that we will of course deliver on our general election manifesto pledge to extend coastal communities funding. I also wish to take the opportunity to thank him for the work he did when he was doing this job; I am all too aware that I am walking in the shoes of a giant.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Devolution, as promoted by the former Chancellor and former Prime Minister, is no doubt dead in the water. Few real powers have been devolved and even less fiscal devolution has taken place. The only constant theme is the year-on-year cuts passed down to our local government base—the very base that should be the foundation on which devolution is built. When will Ministers bring forward a meaningful plan for devolution? When will they address the Treasury push for continued cuts to our local government base?

Jake Berry: Devolution has been one of the great successes of this Government and I have been delighted to welcome Conservative colleagues as our new metro mayors, from James Palmer in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Ben Houchen in the Tees Valley and of course Andy Street in the West Midlands, to Tim Bowles in the West of England. The Labour party talked about devolution for years, but what did Labour do? Absolutely nothing. We are getting on with devolution and we are delivering for every region of this country.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome the Minister’s announcement about the coastal communities fund a moment ago. He will be aware that a major regeneration scheme is being developed by North East Lincolnshire Council, about which I wrote to the Secretary of State a couple of weeks ago. Will the Minister agree to meet me and other representatives from the area so that we can move this forward very quickly?

Jake Berry: Yes.

City Deals

5. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Scottish Government on proposed city deals since 26 June 2017. [900505]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is leading on Scotland’s city deals; he spoke to the Scottish Government as recently as last Thursday. No direct discussions have recently taken place between Ministers from this Department and the Scottish Government on this specific issue, although we would welcome such talks.

Alan Brown: I thank the Minister for that answer. Interestingly, the Democratic Unionist party managed to get £1 billion out of this Government in just a couple of weeks, yet the remaining city deals for Scotland are still on the table. Will he speak to the Secretary of State for Scotland to get his Government to push these deals along? While he is at it, will he consider the Ayrshire growth deal as well, because there has so far been a failure to have meaningful talks on that?

Jake Berry: On the Ayrshire growth deal, my understanding is that Ministers met Keith Brown MSP and local partners from Ayrshire in January and again in April to discuss the priorities for it. I would have thought that Scottish National party Members would welcome the fact that more than half a billion pounds went to Glasgow for its city deal, and that £53 million went to Inverness and the highlands and £125 million went to Aberdeen for theirs. Why do SNP Members not get behind their own cities and city deals, rather than sniping from the sidelines?

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): Ashover in my constituency is being blighted by planning applications that we believe are inappropriate, despite our trying to put a neighbourhood plan in place, as the council had not put in place a local plan in time. Will the Minister be willing to meet me to talk about the challenge that Ashover is experiencing, as he will perhaps be able to offer some advice about a village caught between a rock and a hard place?

Jake Berry: It is for my hon. Friend to have a meeting with the housing Minister, who I am sure will be happy to have such a meeting.

Mr Speaker: It was not altogether to do with city deals, but nevertheless the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) has plunged his feet into the water. We appreciate that and wish him well in further contributions in the House.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Not too far from the Scottish city deals are the great prospects for one in Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State was kind enough to meet us just prior to the election, and since the election we now have an agreement that we will bring forward city deals for Northern Ireland. May I ask the Minister to engage as soon as possible ministerially, so that we can make sure we get the best deal for Belfast and our city regions?

Jake Berry: We have already engaged with Belfast on the city deals and we look forward to working together to ensure that we can deliver on their promise. City deals for Northern Ireland are long overdue. They have succeeded in England, in Scotland and in Wales; now it is Northern Ireland's turn, and we look forward to it.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The reality is that the deal with the DUP has seen Northern Ireland get £1 billion, which is more than all of Scotland's city deals so far put together. The Edinburgh and south-east Scotland city regional deal has been delayed and the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, Keith Brown, has had meetings cancelled at late notice by the UK Government. Will the Minister confirm whether the UK Government take Scottish city deals seriously and will he meet the ambition of the Ayrshire growth deal, the Tay cities deal and the Stirling deal?

Jake Berry: We absolutely take the entirety of Scotland's ambitious plans very seriously. That is why, as I said earlier, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is leading on this important policy. If the hon. Lady thinks that I or my Department can do something more, she must let me know.

Alison Thewliss: The city deals so far have seen Scottish cities' plans short-changed by the UK Government. The Scottish Government have put in far more than the UK Government have sought to find. If money can be found for Northern Ireland—if £1 billion can appear overnight—how long will Scottish cities have to wait before they get their money?

Jake Berry: All the Scottish cities agreed the city deals mutually with the Government. Some £523 million has gone to Glasgow, £53 million to Inverness and Highland, £125 million to the Aberdeen region and, with a deal for Edinburgh and other deals on the table, I do not think the hon. Lady will have to wait too long.

Homelessness

6. **Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of trends in the number of homeless people sleeping rough between 2010 and 2016. [900506]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): Nobody should ever have to sleep rough. My Department co-funded Crisis's recent Housing First report, which shows how that approach can work to end rough sleeping for those with the most complex needs. We are now considering how Housing First can help our manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping by 2027.

Ellie Reeves: Official figures released by the Minister's Department continue to show year-on-year increases in the number of rough sleepers since 2010, including a 3% increase in London alone in the past year. Rough sleeping is often linked to mental health issues, so what specific steps will his Department take during this Parliament to address the mental health crisis among rough sleepers?

Mr Jones: I thank the hon. Lady for that question and welcome her to the House. A number of underlying issues keep people on the streets when they are rough sleeping, and they certainly include mental health issues. Let me give her some insight into what is happening in her constituency: there is a social impact bond focusing on getting people with underlying mental health issues off the streets. I hope that she welcomes that.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): In my constituency, homelessness is raised with me regularly already. Will my hon. Friend lay out the progress with the Government's homelessness reduction taskforce so that I can allay some of those concerns?

Mr Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and welcome him to the House. He is right that the Government are setting up a homelessness reduction taskforce in addition to the measures in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the homelessness prevention trailblazers being run by the Government as a forerunner to the Act's coming into effect. The culture is now starting to change and councils are starting to help people far earlier as a result of the trailblazers in areas where they are taking place.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Rough sleeping in Plymouth is on the increase and large numbers of those who are sleeping rough served our country in the armed forces; they are veterans. What discussions has the Minister had with the Ministry of Defence about increasing the amount of funding going into support for rough sleeping veterans so that we can give all our veterans a decent home?

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman mentions a critical area and it is vital that we support veterans who are rough sleeping. I run a cross-party working group attended by a number of Ministers, including one from the Ministry of Defence, and this is certainly a subject that we are eagerly trying to address.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): We have heard about mental health issues and veteran issues, but does the Minister agree that another huge problem is addiction to both alcohol and drugs? What is he doing in that area?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes a perceptive point. The use of drugs, particularly psychoactive substances such as Spice, which seems to be prevalent among rough sleepers, is having a very detrimental effect on getting people off the street. She will have heard that last week the Home Office launched a drug strategy, and we are working closely with it on that because we realise how critical that is in dealing with the underlying issues and making sure that we can help people off the streets.

Grenfell Tower Fire

7. **Emma Dent Coad** (Kensington) (Lab): By what date all those who have lost their homes as a result of the Grenfell Tower fire will be permanently re-housed. [900508]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): I can confirm that the first new permanent homes will be available very shortly, and more are being secured, either in Kensington and Chelsea or very close by. In the meantime, good-quality, fully furnished temporary accommodation in the local area has been offered to every family.

Emma Dent Coad: I am sorry; I am not too sure about the formalities of this. In some cases, people are refusing homes because one single unsuitable offer has been made to them. That is absolutely true. I am dealing with casework daily, and I am amazed that only 22 households have been matched with temporary accommodation; four have moved in. What on earth is going on? There are empty homes all across the borough, and they are still not being taken up. People are being offered unsuitable homes. Could the Secretary of State please say what is happening here?

Sajid Javid: First of all, I can tell the hon. Lady that over 220 temporary homes have been identified and inspected—that is all good-quality, available accommodation. She referred to unsuitable offers; she should certainly bring those details to me, and we will look at them and take this very seriously. There are 169 families who have received offers; 30 offers of temporary accommodation have been accepted, and

nine families have already moved in. As she knows full well from talking to her constituents, many families do not feel ready to move into temporary accommodation, and we will absolutely respect their wishes.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Can any of the costs be met by the landlords' insurance?

Sajid Javid: That may well be the case further down the line, but right now, the absolute priority is to do whatever is necessary to help the victims of the Grenfell Tower tragedy to get into those homes. All those costs will be met by Government wherever necessary.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Is it not absolutely crucial that we increase the amount of social housing available in Kensington and Chelsea? The Government have announced that 68 properties provided by Berkeley will be made available as social housing. Is it not true that negotiations were under way to provide those homes as social housing under a section 106 agreement before the Grenfell fire? So where are the extra new homes coming from?

Sajid Javid: First, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's re-election as Chair of the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government. I agree that we want more social homes—and not just in Kensington and Chelsea; we want to make sure that that choice is offered across the country. With regard to the 68 homes in the Kensington Row development, to which I think he was referring, my understanding was that they were originally planned to be affordable homes, not social homes, so they will be additional. Despite that, given what has happened and the need for social homes in Kensington and Chelsea, we should do more.

Supported Housing: Funding

8. **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): When he plans to publish his Department's response to the consultation on funding for supported housing. [900509]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): Developing a sustainable funding model for supported housing is a priority. We welcome the input into our recent consultation. We are now carefully taking stock of the joint report by the Communities and Local Government Committee and the Select Committee on Work and Pensions on supported housing, and we will set out further details of our plans in the autumn.

Jessica Morden: There are 38,500 people in supported accommodation in Wales, and landlords say that decisions about future developments are being delayed due to uncertainty about future funding. Will the Minister confirm that any proposals, devolved or not, will properly fund current and future needs in Wales, especially given Wales's ageing population?

Mr Jones: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. Nobody is under any illusions about how important supported housing and its provision are to all our constituents. That is why we have confirmed that we will exempt supported housing from the local housing allowance cap until 2019, by which time we will come forward with

a suitable solution. As I say, we are looking to bring forward our plans in the autumn, and we are taking our time to make sure that those plans work and are right, so that we bring forward that supply of supported housing. In England, we are putting £400 million in capital funding behind that, to bring forward new units.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Will my hon. Friend update the House on what more is being done to support the victims of domestic abuse in supported housing?

Mr Jones: Domestic abuse is a critical issue across the country. We want to eradicate it, but we must understand that we need to provide safe refuge provision for people who do end up in that very difficult position. We announced earlier this year that we are supporting 76 projects to create 2,200 bed spaces to support 19,000 victims across the country.

Local Authorities: Financial Support

9. **Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): What discussions he has had with local authority leaders on financial support for local authorities since the Government announced their policy on the 100% business rates retention. [900510]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): The Government are committed to delivering the manifesto pledge to continue to give local authorities greater control over the money they raise. We will open a conversation with local government over the next few months about the best way to achieve this.

Imran Hussain: Plans for the 100% retention of business rates fell at the general election and were not introduced in the Queen's Speech. Will the Minister explain whether the Government still plan to legislate for 100% retention? What should already cash-strapped local authorities do in the interim as the revenue support grant is phased out?

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. As I said, the Government are committed to delivering our manifesto pledge to give local authorities greater control over the money they raise. To give councils certainty, we have given an unprecedented four-year settlement, which 97% of local authorities have taken up. That does not end until 2019-20, during which time we will bring forward further proposals, which we will work with local government to achieve.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): If Barnet got the same Government support as Camden, it would probably be a realistic option for Barnet to reduce council tax to zero. Will the Minister look at the allocation of funding between outer and inner London to give boroughs such as Barnet a fairer share of resources?

Mr Jones: My right hon. Friend raises an important point. After more than 10 years without the funding formula being looked at, many areas across the country feel a number of challenges, with demographic and service pressures that are encountered more in some places than in others. I assure her that we will look at these matters carefully through the fair funding review.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Before the election, the Government had a plan and a timetable for business rates retention. We know the revenue support grant is going in 2020. In the absence of legislation in the Queen's Speech, I have asked the Government five times how they will introduce measures to fill the financial black hole. Can I assume from the Minister's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) that the previous measures in the Local Government Finance Bill, and the timetable, have now been ditched? Will he now give absolute certainty to local councils? What precisely will be in place by 2020 when the RSG goes?

Mr Jones: I think this is the sixth time that I have answered the hon. Gentleman's question; his question has been put with a considerable amount of faux rage each time, although it is an important issue. I say to him again that we are absolutely committed to what we said in our manifesto: we will give local authorities greater control over the money they raise. When his Government were in power, they only ever gave local authorities a year's certainty—a one-year settlement. We have given a four-year settlement, which 97% of councils have taken up. That enables us to have time to bring forward a sensible solution that works for local government, and we will work with local government to deliver that.

Housebuilding

10. **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the building of high-quality, high-density housing. [900511]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): In February's housing White Paper, the Government set out a plan for high-quality, high-density housing. The Government plan to implement this through changes to the national planning policy framework later this year.

Neil Parish: Our Conservative manifesto committed to supporting new high-quality housing

"like mansion blocks, news houses and terraced streets."

How are the Government working to fulfil this promise and to build housing that is attractive, dense and popular with the public?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right: it is about not just the quantity of housing, but the quality too. That is why, for example, getting local people engaged in neighbourhood plans is so important, and it is why we will be bringing forward the changes that we set out in the housing White Paper.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I asked the former Housing Minister back in April what the Government were doing to protect homeowners following the bogus homes scandal, which saw people spending significant sums, only to find that properties were unfinished, that basic plumbing was not working and that wiring was left unsafe. That was not a unique problem: Shelter has found that half of all new build buyers report a major problem on moving in. The former Minister said that an announcement was imminent, but there was nothing in the Conservative manifesto, the Queen's Speech or the Secretary of State's response to my hon.

Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) earlier. When will the Government act to protect buyers of new build properties?

Sajid Javid: Of course it is very important—we had a similar question earlier—to make sure that people buying new properties get exactly what they believed they were purchasing and, where that is not the case, that they receive help in putting things right. There are already procedures in place, and we are looking to see what more can be done.

Private Rented Sector

12. **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of borough-wide licensing schemes for private rented sector landlords on standards and safety in that sector. [900513]

The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Alok Sharma): Licensing can be an effective tool where it is targeted at delivering improved standards and safety in the private rented sector for areas suffering from serious problems. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, in April 2015 further conditions for applying selective licensing were introduced.

Stephen Timms: Newham Council introduced the first borough-wide private rented sector licensing in 2013. Last week, the council applied to renew the scheme for a further five years. It has been very successful, enabling the council, working with agencies such as Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, to concentrate resources on the small number of private landlords causing problems. Some 81% of Newham residents say it has been effective. Can the Minister reassure me that renewal of the scheme will get the go-ahead?

Alok Sharma: I can certainly reassure the right hon. Gentleman that the scheme will be considered on its merits and in accordance with whether it meets the strategy requirements in part 3 of the Housing Act 2004, which was, of course, introduced under a Labour Government.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): In Bath, we have a high number of family homes that have been turned into student accommodation, often with very low housing standards, and students take them up because they have no choice. In the light of the Grenfell disaster, will the Minister ensure that student safety is protected, by encouraging councils to include compulsory electrical safety checks as part of these licensing schemes?

Alok Sharma: We want all landlords, whether they provide student accommodation or otherwise, to keep their tenants safe. As the hon. Lady will know, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is looking at issues related to electrical safety.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): The private rented sector has the poorest quality housing in my constituency. It is unregulated, and it needs looking at. I would very much welcome Manchester having a borough-wide licensing scheme like the one in Newham. I ask Ministers to take this issue very seriously, before we see safety concerns in the private rented sector as well.

Alok Sharma: If Manchester, or indeed any other area, wants to come forward with such proposals, they should make them known to the DCLG, and we will look at them on their merits.

Waste Collection

13. **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on ensuring that local councils meet legislative requirements on waste collection. [900514]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): There is close collaboration between my Department and Ministers at DEFRA on waste collection issues. Ultimately, it is for local councils to determine when collections take place, but in doing so I would strongly urge them to consider the wishes of local people.

Chris Davies: Prior to the recent local elections, and against the wishes of local people, Powys County Council took the decision to reduce waste collection from fortnightly to three-weekly. What more can my hon. Friend do to ensure that local people's views are taken into account on waste issues to prevent potential health hazards?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend has been a champion in the House on this issue. As he knows, it is a devolved matter in Wales. Ultimately, it is for local councils to decide on the frequency of collections. In England, we have done a great deal to proactively support councils to respond to the wishes of local people on this issue. I would say to my hon. Friend that this is the service people associate most with their local council, and the council should be mindful of the fact that local people should certainly be consulted before any changes are made.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Rather than lecturing councils about their legislative requirements, would the Minister like to come up to Barrow and Furness—or so many other councils, particularly across the north of England—to see the scale of the cuts that these councils are having to implement and the near impossibility of being able to balance a budget in these situations, and provide more help?

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman highlights the mess that the public finances were left in when the Labour party left government in 2010, and this Government have been picking up the pieces of that for the past seven years. Unlike Labour, we have given a four-year settlement to local authorities—97% of authorities have taken that up—to give them more space and time to plan to change services to reflect the changing financial environment.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are running late, but I want to take one last question from a new Member—Darren Jones.

New Homes for Social Rent

14. **Darren Jones** (Bristol North West) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the trend in the number of new homes available for social rent since 2010. [900515]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place. Since 2010 we have delivered nearly 330,000 affordable homes, including over 120,000 homes for social rent. Our priorities are to boost housing supply and to build more affordable homes to rent and to buy.

Darren Jones: Tens of thousands of Bristolians are waiting for a council house and many more are stuck in expensive, insecure and inadequate private sector housing. Many of these tenants are young families who feel disempowered and stuck in a system that does not care. Will the Secretary of State visit my constituency in Bristol to see at first hand how his supposed radical reform is failing my constituents who are in often damp, inadequate and insecure housing?

Sajid Javid: We set out in our manifesto—again, I talked about this very recently at the Local Government Association conference—our ambition to help local authorities that have ambitions to build more council homes, so if that is what Bristol wants, then the Mayor of Bristol should approach me.

Topical Questions

T1. [900526] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): The ongoing response to the Grenfell tragedy has understandably dominated my Department's work for the past few weeks, and it will remain a priority in the months and years ahead, but we have not let up on our wider work. We have launched our £2.3 billion housing infrastructure fund, we have introduced the Telecommunications Infrastructure (Relief from Non-Domestic Rates) Bill, and later this week we will set out further details on our plan to get more homes built in the right places.

Mr Speaker: I see that the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) has beetled away from his seat and looks as though he is about to exit the Chamber. I would have called him at topical questions if he were standing, but I will not if he is not. Anyway, he has got the public information announcement, for which I am sure he is duly grateful.

Sir Edward Leigh: As you know, Mr Speaker, in Lincolnshire we have some wonderful coastal resorts. They trip off the tongue as a litany of sun and fun: Cleethorpes, Mablethorpe, Skegness. Indeed, Mr Speaker, when you go on your holidays on Thursday, do not go to Italy and France—come to bracing Skegness. Can my right hon. Friend promise to use the coastal communities fund to promote all-round tourism and, after Brexit, match the £143 million we receive from the European regional development fund for these resorts?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend rightly highlights the importance of all our coastal communities, including, of course, those in Lincolnshire, many of which I had the pleasure of visiting during the recent general election campaign. I can assure him that we continue to use the coastal communities fund, and whatever other resources we have available, to help promote those areas.

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree with the Conservative leader of Warwickshire County Council, who also leads on community welfare for the Local Government Association, that fining councils and withholding money for delayed discharges will exacerbate the social care crisis, and has he spoken to the Health Secretary about these plans?

Sajid Javid: Of course I have spoken to the Health Secretary, and indeed I spoke to the leader of Warwickshire County Council only last week. I think there is a very broad understanding that with regard to combating and reducing delayed transfers of care, there is a role to play for local authorities and for the NHS.

T3. [900528] **Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): Plymouth is leading the way on innovation in social care. The work between the local authority and care provider has broken new ground. What more can the Government do to support local authorities that are working so hard to meet social care needs in places such as Plymouth?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): I am pleased to hear about the good work in Plymouth. My Department works closely with the Department of Health to promote joined-up working across health and social care, including capturing good examples of innovation across the country, through the better care fund.

T2. [900527] **Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): More than 50% of fires in people's homes have an electrical source of ignition, and the Department set up a working group last August to look at electrical safety in the private rented sector. Does the Secretary of State agree with me and others, including London Fire Brigade, Electrical Safety First and Shelter, that it is time for a more preventive approach to electrical fires, and that mandatory five-year electrical safety tests should be introduced as a matter of urgency in the private rented sector?

The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Alok Sharma): As the hon. Lady may be aware, a working group within the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is looking at precisely those matters. In the light of the Grenfell fire, the Prime Minister has made it clear that it should bring forward its work and recommendations.

T4. [900529] **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): The Guinness Partnership is reviewing fire safety measures in its three high-rise buildings in Havant. If it concludes that new sprinklers are required, will the Minister join me in calling on private landlords to take responsibility and meet the cost of installing those sprinklers?

Alok Sharma: Obviously, the Guinness Partnership will need to determine, with the local fire service, what is needed to keep those properties safe. As the Secretary of State has made absolutely clear, where work is necessary to ensure the fire safety of social housing, a lack of resources should not prevent it from going ahead.

T9. [900534] **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating Nottingham Community Housing Association, which has been recognised by the Almshouse Association for its refurbishment of the William Woodsend memorial homes in my constituency? Will he also listen to NCHA and give it the certainty to enable future investment by dropping his plans to cut housing benefit for supported and sheltered tenants?

Sajid Javid: I join the hon. Lady in commending Nottingham Community Housing Association and so many other housing associations across the country on their work. I think that the housing association sector welcomes our provision of record funding and of new flexibility so that it can do more of what it does.

T5. [900530] **Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What steps has the Department taken to provide safe and legal spaces in which Travellers can reside, instead of them having to go on really nice green spaces in Oakwood in Derbyshire, which they leave in a terrible mess?

Alok Sharma: I know from my own constituency that unauthorised encampments can cause distress for local communities. The Government are absolutely committed to reducing the number of unauthorised sites by providing affordable, good-quality accommodation for Travellers.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Will the inquiry into electoral conduct take full cognisance of the superb all-party report written by the previous Deputy Speaker, Natascha Engel, which has, sadly, been rebuffed by successive leaders of parties on both sides of the House?

Sajid Javid: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the inquiry, which was announced by the Prime Minister and will be led by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, should take account of all information. We heard during last week's debate how many hon. Members and candidates suffered racism and other forms of abuse during the general election. I also suffered that. I am sure that everyone in this House agrees that racism has no place in our society.

T6. [900531] **Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon) (Con): What is the current status of the Devon and Somerset devolution bid? Do they still need to have a directly elected mayor to get the full devolution package, and will the Minister please meet the leaders of Devon and Somerset councils and me this autumn to discuss the way forward?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): Our manifesto makes it clear that there will be no requirement for mayors in rural counties. Devon and Somerset have not to date submitted any combined authority proposals, but I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend and his council leader in due course.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): A growing number of Grenfell survivors are being placed in budget hotels in my constituency as the central London hotels fill up for the tourist season. Despite their being unsuitable for long stays, especially for young families, they are being booked by the month. That gives the lie to the argument that the Government have suitable accommodation ready—not temporary or unsuitable, but permanent accommodation. Will the Secretary of State ask Kensington and Chelsea to use some of the £274 million in its reserves to buy a couple of hundred homes and make sure that those people have decent houses?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman will know that money is not the issue. We have already made it absolutely clear that we will do whatever it takes to find the victims of Grenfell Tower permanent homes. That is exactly what we are doing, but we will be led by the victims themselves, at their pace, on what they need.

T7. [900532] **Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): Overton, Oakley and Whitchurch in my constituency have produced really ambitious neighbourhood plans with generous housing targets, but those communities are now concerned about the infrastructure investment required to make the housing developments happen. What can the Minister do to help?

Alok Sharma: I commend my hon. Friend's constituents for putting together neighbourhood plans—a great innovation that this Government introduced. In terms of infrastructure, I encourage him to get his local planning authorities to bid for the £2.3 billion housing infrastructure fund that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced earlier this month.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): When I was growing up, I had the security of the roof of a council flat over my head. I wonder what the Secretary of State would say to the 11-year-old boy in my constituency who pulled me aside after a classroom visit just last week because he, his mother and his two siblings are living in one room in a hostel, as they have been for more than a year. What message does the Secretary of State have for such children in my constituency who no longer have the security of a decent place to live?

Sajid Javid: My message is that successive Governments have not built enough homes of all types, and, if we are going to do that, we should all unite around the housing White Paper.

T8. [900533] **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in commending excellent Cheltenham homeless charities Cheltenham Open Door and P3 for their compassionate and, above all, early intervention, which is turning lives around in my constituency?

Mr Marcus Jones: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the excellent work that is being done by the charities that he mentions in Cheltenham. Early intervention is absolutely critical. That is why doing things earlier to prevent people from becoming homeless is the bedrock of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Already, through the homelessness prevention trailblazers that were the forerunners of that Act, the culture among the local authorities involved is definitely changing towards prevention.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I have regularly raised my concerns about the safety of the rapid conversion of family homes in my constituency into houses in multiple occupation. In view of the Grenfell disaster, do the Government have any plans to issue new guidance to local planning authorities, particularly about the safety of such conversions?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that. There are many lessons to learn from the Grenfell tragedy, some of which will come from the public inquiry. The expert panel on fire safety has already made recommendations, and if they recommend anything urgent, we will implement it. I am also looking to see what more we can do regarding building regulations and enforcement.

T10. [900535] **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What changes to the national planning policy framework are planned to implement the Conservative manifesto commitment to strengthen protection for ancient woodlands?

Sajid Javid: We will be bringing forward proposals very shortly to implement what is in the housing White Paper, under which ancient woodland will receive the same protection as green belt.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I thank the Minister for the northern powerhouse, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), for visiting New Ferry in my constituency, where the House will remember there was recently a terrible explosion. As a result of that meeting, the leader of the council in Wirral, Phil Davies, has written to the Minister. May I ask him to expedite a reply to that letter?

Jake Berry: No one could visit the scene of the disaster in New Ferry and talk to the residents without realising the seriousness of the explosion that took place some months ago. Following my meeting, I received a letter from Phil Davies. A response will be going out later today, dealing with the queries he raised.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Can the Secretary of State tell me what he will do to ensure that Bradford Council builds on the brownfield sites that it has identified before it starts concreting over and building on greenfield sites in the green belt in my constituency?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. As we made clear in the housing White Paper, we expect brownfield sites always to be the priority to meet our housing need. That is certainly what I would expect to see from Bradford.

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): It was not entirely wise for the Minister for the northern powerhouse last Monday to come across the Pennines from his Lancashire constituency and tell the people of Yorkshire that, in his words, they could not have “full Yorkshire devolution”. Are not those decisions best made in God’s own county, not in Whitehall and certainly not in Lancashire, with its very different geography and the dominance of Manchester and Liverpool?

Jake Berry: As a proud Lancastrian, it is not for me, nor is it for Government, to tell Yorkshire what devolution deal it should have. However, I gently point out that

in 2015, Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield asked for powers from the Government and we gave them to them; they asked for new money from the Government and we gave it to them; and they asked to have an election next May and we gave it to them. When will the people of south Yorkshire learn to take yes for an answer?

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Kettering Borough Council, of which I am a member, provides specialist housing advice to those in financial difficulties to prevent homelessness in the first place. It is working closely with local housing associations to bring forward a record number of new homes for social rent. Is that not exactly the right approach?

Mr Marcus Jones: I commend the work that Kettering Borough Council is doing. In my experience, where a local authority is preventing homelessness, it is doing very much those types of things, particularly helping people to deal with financial challenges through things such as budgeting. It is certainly good to hear that Kettering is bringing forward a significant number of affordable homes that residents in Kettering will benefit from.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): We heard earlier from the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) about coastal communities, but Dawdon, Easington Colliery, Blackhall and Horden in my constituency are also former coalfield communities that have suffered terrible levels of under-investment since the pits were closed under a previous Tory Government. Will the Minister meet me and the Coalfields Regeneration Trust to see what can be done to address those problems?

Jake Berry: It is not just for the Government to support our coastal communities. I encourage all Members across the House to visit the fantastic Great British coastline. I will, of course, happily meet the hon. Gentleman and representatives of his constituency to work out what more the coastal communities fund can do for him.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): In my Cheadle constituency, Woodford neighbourhood forum is drawing up its local plan. However, there are concerns that the Greater Manchester spatial framework will override it. What assurances can my hon. Friend give neighbourhood forums that their plans will be given appropriate consideration?

Alok Sharma: As the Secretary of State reiterated, we made a commitment in the housing White Paper to protect the green belt. I cannot comment specifically on the plans my hon. Friend talks about, but I emphasise that plan makers need to consult their communities, especially in neighbourhood forums. Once a neighbourhood plan has been brought into force, it is part of the strategic development plan of an area.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will come to the points of order because there are a number today relating to one matter that seems to me to contain a degree of urgency, so I will treat of it very soon. Just before I do, I have a short statement to make myself.

Speaker's Statement

3.38 pm

Mr Speaker: On Thursday 13 July, the text of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill was available through a tweet before the Bill was presented in the House. Points of order were raised about the Bill being available online before it was available to Members. An immediate investigation was carried out.

A flaw in the publishing process within the House of Commons service meant that the Bill text was inadvertently available on a live parliamentary web server before the Bill was presented. A link to the text was circulated on social media just before 11 am. Immediate action has been taken to amend the publishing process to ensure that this cannot happen again. No one outside the House of Commons service bears any responsibility for this mistake.

This was a serious incident and I have been assured that the required changes have been made to strengthen the Bill publishing arrangements. I hope that that assuages the concern of right hon. and hon. Members.

Points of Order

3.39 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I seek your advice on the urgent matter of the HS2 route and the announcements due to be made by the Transport Secretary, which will affect millions of people? The Secretary of State began his consultation with an oral statement last November, and there had been an expectation that he would announce his final decisions today in an oral statement; indeed, parts of the media were briefed to that effect. All the indications now are that the news will be sneaked out in a written statement any time now. This is a gross discourtesy and adds insult to injury for my constituents. I seek your advice, Mr Speaker, about how we can get the Transport Secretary to come to the House and show some accountability on this issue.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. As others wish to raise points of order relating to the same subject, I will take them—or at least a number of them—and then respond.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your advice, because today the Government have announced—they have certainly been all over the airwaves—£6.6 billion of contracts on HS2. When such a large amount of taxpayers' money is being spent, it seems to me that the Minister should come to the House and make a statement. I appreciate that the urgent question, the statement and the business on the Order Paper today are equally important, but I wonder whether you could extend the sitting of the House, Mr Speaker, and allow us to have a statement from the Minister, in the light of what has happened with contractors before, CH2M having withdrawn from a £17 million contract because of a lack of due diligence and conflicts of interest. We need to look at these contractors, because one contractor has major project overruns and has written off millions of pounds, two contractors have pulled out of other public service contracts and one is having financial problems and restructuring. I would therefore seek a statement urgently from the Minister.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Further to the point of order raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), Mr Speaker. I would add that it is not just his constituents but voters across South Yorkshire and beyond who are affected by the decisions related to HS2. Not only that, but this is the latest in a long line of actions by the Government who are demonstrating an unwillingness to make themselves properly available for scrutiny by the House. I wonder what you can do, Mr Speaker, to improve the situation and encourage the Government to stand up and do their job properly.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. On the Order Paper today we have the High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill, which, as it points out, relates to Fradley Wood in Staffordshire, in my constituency. I have two farms on which it was announced there will be quarrying, and that is before we have even had First Reading. I have

elderly residents who are being told that their homes will be taken away from them. We have already heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) about cost overruns. I too, sadly, think it is outrageous that this major item of public expenditure, which is affecting my constituents and those of many others, is not being reflected by a statement here today.

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am saving the right hon. Gentleman up. He is too precious to waste at an early point in our proceedings.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Further to the point of order raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), which I entirely support, Mr Speaker. This is a major announcement affecting my constituency and many others. It is not an HS2 recommendation; it is a Government decision on a previous recommendation. The Government have always come to the House before with an oral statement. While we can ask for an urgent question tomorrow, by that time there will have been public debate on the matter. This House should have the first opportunity to debate it.

Sir Kevin Barron: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Many of my constituents have taken part in the consultation on the re-routing of HS2, over many months now, and we do not know if their voices have been heard. There has been no publication of the consultation, and we are now threatened with a decision that is going to wreck over 100 homes in my constituency and many jobs, with different employers. It is absolutely outrageous that my constituents have been treated with contempt by Ministers, who are not prepared to come to this House, tell us what they have spent all the money on and come to logical decisions on this matter, as opposed to hiding behind making a written statement, we think sometime today.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. As you know, because you have already allocated an Adjournment debate to two colleagues—my right hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron)—and because you have heard us, and me in particular, say it, this possibly £80 billion scheme means that a lot of houses in my constituency are going to be demolished; that roads are going to go straight through a development that has only just taken place; and that in Derbyshire there will be a slow track, dawdling its way to Sheffield and beyond, and then a fast track going to Meadowhall. This is a very important matter, and it should be debated at length, because it is going to cost the taxpayer a small fortune. As you know, Mr Speaker, the Sheffield line could be electrified all the way to London, and the trains could get to London a lot more quickly for a lot less money.

This is an outrage, and that is why I have raised the matter today, along with my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to right hon. and hon. Members for their points of order. What I will say in response is this.

First, my understanding is that the written ministerial statement has now been issued. There was some speculation on when it would be issued, and I am advised that it has been. Secondly, I am not in a position to require a Minister to come to the House today to make a statement; however, it is comparatively unusual for Members on both sides of the House, in unison, to raise such a concern, and to make, to all intents and purposes, exactly similar requests for a statement.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will come to the hon. Gentleman.

In the circumstances, the Secretary of State is bound to hear of these concerns within a matter of minutes. If the right hon. Gentleman wanted to come to the House today to make a statement, I would certainly be very happy to facilitate him.

Finally, the hon. Member for Sheffield—

Mr Betts: South East.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts)—the former hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe—said that an urgent question could be applied for tomorrow, but by then all sorts of briefing would have taken place. I am afraid it is not within the power of the Speaker to reverse time. I cannot do anything about that; I can only deal with the situation as it evolves. What I will say, however, is that if no statement is forthcoming from the Minister, it will be perfectly open to Members to do their best to secure parliamentary time and attention tomorrow. It may be that such an exploration would take place at some length, and it may be that, faced with such a scenario, a Minister might think it prudent and judicious to anticipate the difficulty and offer the statement today instead. I do not know—we shall have to see—but I am on the side of the House in wanting Ministers to be accountable to it. That seems pretty clear to me.

Andy McDonald *rose*—

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I beg the hon. Lady's pardon. Point of order, Mr Andy McDonald, briefly.

Andy McDonald: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Has there been any discussion between you and the Secretary of State about whether the further reports and documents that are scheduled to be published today should have been delayed until the Secretary of State was before the House tomorrow, if at all possible?

Mr Speaker: The short answer is no. There have been no such discussions, and it would not automatically be expected that there should be. Let me simply say to the hon. Gentleman that I have not been advised of any revised plans. We will leave it there for now.

Gill Furniss: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On 27 June, I put a parliamentary question to the Government asking when they would release the report on product safety produced by a working group from the Department

[Gill Furniss]

for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. I am sure you will agree that, given the situation in which we find ourselves, particularly after the Grenfell Tower disaster, it is crucial for the House to be kept up to date with the progress of the report.

On 3 July, I received the response that an answer was being prepared and would be sent in due course. On 12 July, I asked another parliamentary question pursuing the matter, for named-day answer today. May I ask you, Mr Speaker, to kindly ensure that the Government make their response known as a matter of urgency?

Mr Speaker: It is highly undesirable for questions that have been tabled in good faith and an orderly manner some time before the recess not to receive an answer by the time of the recess. That is not some new development articulated at this moment by me from the Chair; it is a long-established and respected practice that Ministers try, to put it bluntly, to clear the backlog. It has customarily been expected that the Leader of the House would be a chaser after progress on such matters. I very much hope that the hon. Lady will receive a substantive reply to her written question or questions before the House rises for the summer recess. That would seem to me to be a matter of proper procedure, and indeed of courtesy from one colleague to another.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The working group to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) refers was set up following a serious fire in my constituency last August. We were promised at least its first report before last Christmas, but we are still waiting. If we do not get it this week, and if we do not get a clear statement from the Government, we will be waiting, both in the case of my constituents and that of Grenfell Tower, until the autumn. The urgency cannot go unremarked by the Minister. Anything you can do to assist with that would be most welcome.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has transmitted his concerns through me to the Government, who will very quickly hear that he is on the war path on the matter, which might yield a positive outcome for him over the next 48 or 72 hours. It is up to him to judge whether, having heard or not heard anything from Ministers, he wishes to find ways of trying to secure attention to the issue on the Floor of the House before we rise for the summer recess.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would have given advance notice of this point of order, but I thought that we were having points of order a little later. Last week, after meeting trade union representatives from Rolls-Royce outside Bristol, I attempted to table a written question asking whether the Government are seeking to stay in the European Aviation Safety Agency post Brexit. My question was rejected, on the grounds that a similar question had been asked back in January and nothing had changed. The answer to that question had been that we cannot pre-empt the negotiations. Today I would like clarity on two points. First, how will we know that nothing has changed if we are not allowed to table questions about this? Secondly, I have been told that I cannot ask the question again until the end of the Brexit negotiations, which seems absolutely ludicrous.

Mr Speaker: Well, it strikes me as a very rum business indeed. I hope that it will be possible for the hon. Lady to receive some satisfaction. My strong advice to her is that she should make the very short journey from here to the Table Office and seek advice, because I am quite sure that it will be possible to achieve a satisfactory outcome. Forgive me for making this point again, but I do make it again: the hon. Lady effectively refers to being denied on grounds of repetition. Repetition is not a novel phenomenon in the House of Commons. I think that we will leave it there for today.

Saudi Arabia: Anticipated Executions

3.53 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on what steps are being taken to intervene in the anticipated execution of 14 people in Saudi Arabia.

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his urgent question. Media reporting has suggested that 14 men could be facing the death penalty in Saudi Arabia for attending protests in the eastern province of the country in 2012. We are looking into the details of the reports and seeking urgent clarity from the Saudi authorities, both in Riyadh and here in London. I have been in contact with the ambassador for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who I know will come back to me with information when he has it.

We regularly make this Government's opposition to the death penalty clear—we are firmly opposed to it—and we raise such concerns at all levels and at all appropriate opportunities. The Saudis are aware of our stance on their human rights, and this position is a matter of public record. The Prime Minister most recently raised this during her visit in April this year.

Tom Brake: I thank the Minister for his helpful response. Evidence points to Saudi Arabia taking the final steps before executing up to 14 people, including at least two who were juveniles at the time of their alleged offences and were convicted on the strength of confessions obtained through the use of torture. Our Prime Minister has highlighted the UK's "long-term and historic relationship" with Saudi Arabia, and has said:

"rather than just standing on the sidelines and sniping, it's important to engage, to talk to people, to talk about our interests and to raise, yes, difficult issues when we feel it's necessary to do so."

I am sure the Prime Minister and the Minister will agree that 14 executions are just such a difficult issue and I am pleased that it has been raised urgently with the Saudi Government.

I would like to ask the following questions, however. Will the Minister ask the Prime Minister to call on Saudi King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to stop the executions—especially of juveniles Mujtaba Sweikat and Salman Qureish—going ahead? If the executions of juveniles and others arrested in relation to alleged protest activity go ahead, will the UK commit to freezing and reviewing any criminal justice assistance which could contribute to the arrest of protestors and dissidents in Saudi Arabia? What further steps will Her Majesty's Government take to condemn Saudi Arabia's use of the death penalty, especially in the case of people with disabilities and juveniles, such as Ali al-Nimr, Dawoud al-Marhoon, and Abdullah al-Zaher?

Our Prime Minister is promoting the UK as a global nation. How she responds to the threat of summary executions by a partner and close ally will determine exactly what kind of global nation she intends the United Kingdom to be—a global champion of human rights or an apologist for human rights abusers.

Alistair Burt: First, on the death penalty, in particular in relation to juveniles, the UK Government oppose the death penalty in all circumstances and in every country, including Saudi Arabia, especially for crimes other than the most serious and for juveniles, in line with the minimum standards set out in the EU guidelines on the death penalty 2008, the provisions of the international covenant on civil and political rights and the Arab charter on human rights. A law has been proposed to King Salman by the Shura Council that codifies the age of majority at 18, and the death penalty should not be given to minors. All the cases the right hon. Gentleman mentioned towards the end of his remarks have been raised specifically by the United Kingdom, and in each case we have received assurances that minors would not be executed.

On the general relationship with Saudi Arabia, our starting point for engagement on human rights with all countries is based on what is practical, realistic and achievable, and we will always be ready to speak out as a matter of principle. Ministers frequently discuss human rights and raise concerns with the Saudi Arabia Government. We have a balanced relationship with Saudi Arabia and use engagement to encourage reform. This is a society that is going through a process of reform, heading towards Vision 2030, which the new Crown Prince has laid out as a pattern for Saudi Arabia for the future. Women's rights are changing with the addition of women to the Shura Council. It is a process that goes not at our pace, but at other paces.

We make sure that human rights are a key part of every conversation that senior colleagues have, and that would certainly be the case should it be necessary to intervene should any minors be in the position described by the right hon. Gentleman. As I indicated at the beginning, we have very sketchy reports on this at the moment. That is why we are doing more and I will write to the right hon. Gentleman when I receive further, more detailed information, so that he has it available.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, Tom Tugendhat.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

We have heard—over the years, indeed—Her Majesty's Government talk about the influence they have had over the actions of the Saudi Government in terms of capital offences. I would be very grateful if the Minister could from his place today give some examples of how that has paid off, because, on days like this, it does leave some questions to be answered.

Alistair Burt: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election to the office of Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. It is an important office, which was well held by his predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), to whom we would all pay tribute. These are difficult jobs done by colleagues, and my hon. Friend did it particularly well, but we are very pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) in his place.

It is so difficult to try to prove a negative. The authorities with which we deal in Saudi Arabia are not necessarily in a position to make their judicial decisions

[Alistair Burt]

dependent on external pressure, and nor would we be in a similar situation. We know that allegations are made about possible executions, including those of minors, and that they then do not happen, but we do not know whether that can be laid at the door of any specific representation. I can assure my hon. Friend and the House that these representations are regularly made to a changing society and a changing judicial process in Saudi Arabia, which must, of necessity, be theirs and not ours.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I add my thanks to you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question today. I also thank the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) for bringing such an important matter to the House and for speaking so eloquently on the subject.

I am sure that all Members present today share my concern about the impending executions. Saudi Arabia is one of the world's most prolific executioners, and the death penalty is increasingly being used there as a punishment for non-violent acts. In January 2016, the Saudi authorities executed 47 men in a single day for alleged terrorism offences, and just last Monday, six men were killed. It is becoming clear that these executions are being used not only as a form of draconian punishment but as a tool to suppress political opposition, to fight sectarian religious battles against the Shi'a minority and to antagonise regional rivals in the process.

It is just over six years since the then Foreign Secretary, William Hague, declared that there would be "no downgrading of human rights under this Government".

He went on to argue that

"pursuing a foreign policy with a conscience is...in the long term enlightened national interest of our country."

It is striking how far the Conservatives have strayed from that commitment. When it comes to our relationship with Saudi Arabia, it would appear that human rights concerns are now of secondary importance to trade. This Government have treated Riyadh's human rights record as an inconvenient embarrassment rather than a cause for serious concern. Their reluctance to champion the values of human rights runs counter to who we are as a country and risks eroding our international standing, just when we need it most. My party's position on this matter is clear: the 14 executions—including those of two juveniles and one disabled man—must not take place. I call on the Government to use their influence to stand up for human rights and unreservedly condemn these planned executions.

Alistair Burt *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before the Minister responds, I must say in all kindness to the hon. Lady that the fluency of her delivery was unfortunately not matched by any conformity with the expected procedure for the posing of an urgent question. I allowed her to continue, but for future reference—this is directed not only to the hon. Lady but more widely—an urgent question requires a brief sentence or two in response to the Minister, followed by a series of questions. It is not an occasion for the setting out of an alternative party position. It is not like a debate—[*Interruption.*] It might very well have been very good, as the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury

(Emily Thornberry) chunters from a sedentary position in a rather inappropriate way, but unfortunately it was not very good at complying with our procedure. I say good-naturedly to the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes)—and I am looking at the Opposition Chief Whip too—that we really must encourage compliance with the required procedure. Now, I would like the Minister very briefly to respond—30 seconds will suffice, I think—before we move on to further questioning.

Alistair Burt: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the hon. Lady for her remarks; I have got the gist of the points that she was making. Saudi Arabia remains a Foreign and Commonwealth Office human rights priority country, particularly because of its use of the death penalty, its record on women's rights and its restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, religion and belief. No aspect of our commercial relationship with Saudi Arabia prevents us from speaking frankly and openly to it about human rights. We will not pursue trade to the exclusion of human rights; they can be, and they are, complementary. The United Kingdom will continue to adhere to that.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The Minister will agree that it is depressing how regularly the death penalty is carried out not just in Saudi Arabia, but in its neighbour Iran, which has already carried out dozens of executions this year. Given the small likelihood of persuading the Saudis to abolish the death penalty completely, does he agree that it is best to focus on getting them to adopt the most basic of standards, such as not executing people for crimes they committed when they were juveniles?

Alistair Burt: Absolutely. I concur with all my hon. Friend's points and, for brevity, I will leave it at that.

Mr Speaker: Splendid man.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) for raising this issue today. The death penalty for political protest is something that horrifies any democrat. With that in mind, we have serious concerns about whether the Government are using their powers. The Minister confirmed that the Prime Minister has raised this matter, so was she satisfied with the response? If she was not, what further action will be taken?

Alistair Burt: The Prime Minister will continue to raise concerns as long as the United Kingdom has them. If we want to move to a position that would satisfy all of us, I suspect that Saudi Arabia is not yet there. Accordingly, the Prime Minister will continue to raise concerns if she believes that they are justified.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend again confirm that the Government oppose and abhor the death penalty in all circumstances and in every country, including Saudi Arabia? Does he share my concern that the death penalty is enshrined in Islamic sharia law—the law of Saudi Arabia? With what force is he making our position known to our counterparts in Saudi Arabia?

Alistair Burt: I can only repeat what I have said before. The United Kingdom's opposition to the death penalty, our carrying that through by votes in this House and our adherence to international conventions makes that clear, but not everyone is the same. The United Kingdom cannot unilaterally change the law elsewhere, but we can and will stand up for the rights that we believe are correct, and from Iran to the United States to Saudi Arabia we will make that clear no matter which country is involved.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): We are constantly told by the Conservatives that we have values in common with Saudi Arabia. What are they? They do not involve human rights or international law, so what values can we possibly share with Saudi Arabia when they propose to crucify somebody and to use the death penalty against minors?

Alistair Burt: In response to the right hon. Lady asking about what we may share, we should not ignore Saudi Arabia's important contribution to regional stability. It has had its own painful experiences as the victim of numerous Daesh attacks, and collaborating with Saudi Arabia has foiled terrorist attacks, potentially saving British lives. There are areas where our interests work together in the interests of the United Kingdom, but that is of course not universal.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Given the fact that—alas, perhaps—we are no longer an imperial power able to send a gunboat to enforce our view of the world, will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in his considerable experience in the Foreign Office, a quiet conversation to make our case and set out our views is far more likely to be effective than shouting at people across the railings?

Alistair Burt: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Different approaches have different impacts. It would certainly not be right for people to be silent on things that they think are important; they should raise them publicly. It is also true, however, that quiet conversations with states over a period of time effect change, which is true in consular cases as well as in the higher profile death penalty cases. My hon. Friend is right that both approaches can have an impact, but sometimes they do not.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): In the Minister's communications with the Saudi authorities about this particular group of people, will he establish whether reports are correct that others, again including juveniles, are facing similar charges?

Alistair Burt: I will make what inquiries I can. Certainly from the media reports we have, it will be important to find out whether any juveniles are involved. Non-governmental organisations in the west are normally quite good at finding out and reporting this information, and the United Kingdom has acted upon such information in the past. We will certainly look for that information, and I will gather as much as I can.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What impact does the Minister believe the 38% cut to the Foreign Office will have on dealing effectively with human rights in Saudi Arabia, or wherever?

Alistair Burt: All aspects of Government must pay attention to the need for financial probity, but the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has made sure that human rights is a key part of our work, certainly for as many years as I have been there—that now spans a few years—and human rights will remain a key part of desk work here and of the work that posts do abroad.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Among numerous others, my understanding is that the two juveniles at risk of execution were charged under Saudi Arabia's anti-cybercrime laws. Is the Minister in a position to confirm or deny that? Can he reassure the House that any cyber-security assistance and training provided by the UK to Saudi Arabia has not been used to facilitate charges that lead to the death penalty?

Alistair Burt: I do not have the detailed information that the hon. Gentleman asks for, but I will seek it. I will also seek reassurances in relation to the collaborative work on cyber-security, which is done to protect the United Kingdom and our common interests, rather than anything else. I will need further information before I can reply, but I will write to him.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that our relationship with Saudi Arabia enables us to raise our human rights concerns? This House should also appreciate that the Government of Saudi Arabia are taking steps to improve their actions on human rights, and particularly to improve the opportunities and rights of women in Saudi Arabian society.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend is right. A vision of Saudi Arabia, as with a number of states in the area, is fixed in people's minds, but it does not always conform to the reality. Progress and reform in some of these states is extremely slow. They are very conservative societies, and sometimes their leaders are ahead of popular and religious opinion. It is a difficult process, but she is right. Objectively, it can be seen that the position of women has improved in relation to access to the Shura council and beyond, and there is more to come. The 100,000 people educated abroad by King Salman's predecessor included women who were educated in the west—in the United States and in Europe—and they were not intended to return to a Saudi Arabia that would be unchanging. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sure the Whips mean well in advising on these matters, but they sometimes get the timing a bit wrong. When an hon. Member is receiving an answer to her inquiry, she should remain in her seat rather than beetling around the Chamber because some Whip suddenly wants to relay some piece of information. It is no doubt well intentioned, but misguided.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): In response to the recent spate of executions, Amnesty International has renewed its call on the Saudi Arabian authorities to immediately establish a moratorium on all executions as a first step towards abolition of the death penalty. Can the Minister lend his support to Amnesty's calls?

Alistair Burt: As we are absolutely opposed to the death penalty in any circumstances, a moratorium is, in a sense, immaterial because we want to see the death penalty stopped everywhere.

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): I hear what the Minister is saying about talking to, asking questions of and advising the Saudi Government, but should not the UK Government stop pussyfooting around on this matter and demand that these executions do not go ahead? Those people were just protesting innocently and honestly for a fair society.

Alistair Burt: I understand the force with which the hon. Gentleman speaks. It is difficult always to convey to colleagues in the House exactly what the ambassador or the Prime Minister say in their conversations to convey, in a different form, exactly the same degree of force and concern that the hon. Gentleman conveys so eloquently.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): How far does the Minister really believe the UK's influence extends over Saudi Arabia? If the UK Government's supposed leverage cannot stop the Saudi Government beheading their citizens, why does he believe it is appropriate for the UK to continue to license the sale of arms to that country?

Alistair Burt: It is impossible to give a simple answer to the question of how much influence one state exerts on another. Let me point to a long-standing relationship with Saudi Arabia. It is a long-standing relationship on security and intelligence matters, which has acted in our interests and for the safety of our citizens. We have a common approach to dealing with not only terror and extremism, but changes in Saudi society over a period of time. As I say, it is not for those outside to take credit for internal changes. This is a continued dialogue with a state that we have known for a long time, but one that is still relatively new and coming to terms with the modern world. I think the relationship is the right one, but we will continue to press for the best values.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that executing individuals who were under 18 at the time of the commission of the alleged offence is in violation of not only international law, but Saudi domestic law? He is therefore on very strong ground in raising this matter. Will he do so in terms, because, whatever the longer term relationship, minors have been executed in the past year and many are now on death row there? Will he say exactly what representation he is making today or tomorrow? If he is in doubt about who is at risk, will he talk to Reprieve about that?

Alistair Burt: I reiterate the point that the UK makes about the death penalty, particularly in relation to minors. Where cases involving minors are brought to our attention, we reference them specifically, as we have done in several of the cases raised by the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). I am gaining more information about the matters referred to in the newspaper report today, and if they do involve minors, specific representations will indeed be made.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Points of order normally come after statements; I made an exception for particular matters

earlier. Is this just because the hon. Gentleman wants to beetle off to some other commitment or is this urgent for the House now?

Simon Hoare: Sir, I would not presume to adjudge its urgency; I shall leave that to the Chair. There appears to be some confusion, which I certainly would not want, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) is of a like mind. Last week, when we had the opportunity to question a Minister about matters relating to Saudi Arabia, I conferred with one of the Clerks at the Desk to find out whether my having been on a visit to Saudi Arabia was a declarable interest. The advice I was given by the Clerk was that it was entirely up to the individual Member but as I was raising a question—rather than instigating an early-day motion or debate, or giving a long speech—on our relations with Saudi Arabia, there was no registrable interest to declare. I understand that that might have changed today. I would not, as I know my hon. Friend would not, have wanted to have misled the House in any way, and I would value clarification on whether we need to declare an interest when merely asking a question of a Minister.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. As far as I am aware, nothing has changed today. Although he may find this less than fully satisfactory, or even a tad disquieting, I am afraid I must give him the advice the Clerks tend to give: it is for each Member to judge whether something requires to be declared in the course of any parliamentary contribution. I put it to him that certainly a relevant factor for him to consider is whether such a visit was externally financed; I would have thought that that was a germane consideration. Members go on Select Committee trips on a very regular basis and, as far as I am aware, they do not always, in the course of every question, refer to the fact that they have been on a Select Committee visit somewhere. If there is a question of outside financing and an outside body, it might be thought to be prudent to refer to it. I think that was the matter the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent had in mind, and if she wants, briefly, now to make any declaration, I am happy for her to do so.

Helen Whately: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. It has been brought to my attention that in asking a question a moment ago, I perhaps should have drawn the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Simon Hoare: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am not sure there is a "further", but the hon. Gentleman has always seemed to be an amiable fellow, and therefore I shall indulge him.

Simon Hoare: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Ditto.

Mr Speaker: We are very grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am sure the House feels better informed.

Schools Update

The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):

This Government believe that all children should have an education that unlocks their potential and allows them to go as far as their talent and hard work will take them. That is key to improving social mobility.

We have made significant progress. Nine out of 10 schools are now good or outstanding, the attainment gap is beginning to close and we have launched 12 opportunity areas to drive improvement in parts of the country that we know can do better. But that has all been against a backdrop of unfair funding. We know that the funding system is unfair, opaque and out of date, and that means that although we hold schools against the same accountability structure, wherever they are, we fund them at very different levels. In addition, resources are not reaching the schools that need them most.

School funding is at a record high because of the choices we have made to protect and increase school funding even as we faced difficult decisions elsewhere to restore our country's finances, but we recognise that at the election people were concerned about the overall level of funding for schools as well as its distribution. As the Prime Minister has said, we are determined to listen. That is why I am today confirming our plans to get on with introducing a national funding formula in 2018-19. I can announce that that will now be supported by significant extra investment into the core schools budget over the next two years.

The additional funding I am setting out today, together with the introduction of a national funding formula, will provide schools with the investment they need to offer a world-class education to every child. There will therefore be £1.3 billion for schools and high needs across 2018-19 and 2019-20 in addition to the schools budget set at spending review 2015. This funding is across the next two years as we transition to the national funding formula. Spending plans for the years beyond 2019-20 will be set out in a future spending review.

As a result of this investment, core funding for schools and high needs will rise from almost £41 billion in 2017-18 to £42.4 billion in 2018-19. In 2019-20 it will rise again to £43.5 billion. This represents £1.3 billion in additional investment, £416 million more than was set aside at the last spending review for the core school budget in 2018-19, and £884 million more in 2019-20. It will mean that the total schools budget will increase by £2.6 billion between this year and 2019-20, and per pupil funding will now be maintained in real terms for the remaining two years of the spending review period to 2019-20.

For this Government, social mobility and education are a priority. The introduction of the national funding formula—from which previous Governments shied—backed by the additional investment in schools we are confirming today will be the biggest improvement to the school funding system in well over a decade.

I said when I launched the consultation last December that I was keen to hear as many views as possible on this vital reform. I am grateful for the engagement on the issue of fairer funding and the national funding formula. We received more than 25,000 responses to our consultation, including from Members from across the House. We have listened carefully to the feedback we have received

and we will respond to the consultation in full in September, but I can today tell the House that the additional investment we can make in our schools will allow us to do several things, including increasing the basic amount that every pupil will attract in 2018-19 and 2019-20. For the next two years, this investment will provide for an up to 3% gain a year per pupil for underfunded schools, and a 0.5% a year per-pupil cash increase for every school. We will also continue to protect funding for pupils with additional needs, as we proposed in December. Given this additional investment, we are able to increase the percentage allocated to pupil-led factors; I know hon. Members were keen for that to happen. This formula settlement to 2019-20 will provide at least £4,800 per pupil for every secondary school, which I know Members in a number of areas will particularly welcome. The national funding formula will therefore deliver higher per-pupil funding in respect of every school, and in every local area.

These changes, building on the proposals that we set out in December, will provide a firm foundation as we make historic reforms to the funding system, balancing fairness and stability for schools. It remains our intention that a school's budget should be set on the basis of a single national formula, but a longer transition makes sense to provide stability for schools. In 2018-19 and 2019-20, the national funding formula will set indicative budgets for each school, and the total schools funding received by each local authority will be allocated according to our national fair funding formula, transparently, for the first time.

Local authorities will continue to set a local formula to distribute that funding, and to determine individual school budgets in 2018-19 and 2019-20, in consultation with schools in the area. I will shortly publish the operational guide to allow them to begin that process. To support local authorities' planning, I also confirm that in 2018-19, all local authorities will receive some increase to the amount that they plan to spend on schools and high needs in 2017-18. We will confirm gains for local authorities, based on the final formula, in September. The guide will set out some important areas that are fundamental to supporting a fairer distribution through the national funding formula. For example, we will ring-fence the vast majority of funding provided for primary and secondary schools, although local authorities, in agreement with their local schools forum, will be able to move limited amounts of funding to other areas, such as special schools, where this better matches local need.

As well as this additional investment through the national funding formula, I am confirming our commitment to doubling the physical education and sports premium for primary schools. All primary schools will receive an increase in their PE and sports premium funding in the next academic year.

The £1.3 billion additional investment in core schools funding that I am announcing today will be funded in full from efficiencies and savings that I have identified in my Department's budget, rather than higher taxes or more debt. That of course requires difficult decisions to be taken, but it is right to prioritise schools' core funding, even as we continue the vital task of repairing the public finances. I am maximising the proportion of my Department's budget that is allocated directly to frontline

[Justine Greening]

headteachers, who can then use their professional expertise to ensure that the money is spent where it will have the greatest possible impact.

I have challenged my civil servants to find efficiencies, just as schools are having to. I want to set out briefly the savings and efficiencies that I intend to secure. Efficiencies and savings across our main capital budget can, I believe, release £420 million. The majority of this will be from healthy pupils capital funding, from which we can make savings of £315 million. This reflects reductions in forecast revenue from the soft drinks industry levy. I will be able to channel the planned budget, which remains in place, to frontline schools, while meeting our commitment that every single pound of England's share of spending from the levy will continue to be invested in improving children's health; that includes £100 million in 2018-19 for healthy pupils capital.

We remain committed to an ambitious free schools programme that delivers choice, innovation and higher standards for parents. In delivering the programme, and the plans for a further 140 free schools announced at the last Budget, we will work more efficiently to release savings of £280 million up to 2019-20. This will include delivering 30 of the 140 schools through the local authority route, rather than the free schools route. Across the rest of the Department for Education resource budget, which is more than £60 billion a year, I will reprioritise £250 million in 2018-19 and £350 million in 2019-20 to fund the increase in core schools budget spending that I am announcing today. I plan to redirect £200 million from the Department's central programmes towards frontline funding for schools. Although these projects are useful, I strongly believe that this funding is most and more valuable in the hands of headteachers.

Finally, alongside the extra investment in our core schools budget, it is vital that school leaders strive to maximise the efficient use of their resources, to achieve the best outcomes for all their pupils and to best promote social mobility. We already provide schools with support to do this, but we will now go further to ensure that that support is used effectively by schools. We will continue our commitment to securing substantial efficiency gains over the coming years. Good value national deals that procure better value goods and services on areas that all schools spend money on and purchase goods in can save significant amounts. They are available under the deals based on our existing work such as on insurance or energy. Schools can save an average of 10% on their energy bills if they use a national deal. We will expect schools to be clear if they do not make use of these deals and consequently have higher costs.

Across school spending as a whole, we will improve the transparency and usability of data so that parents and governors can more easily see the way in which funding is being spent, and understand not just educational standards in schools, but financial effectiveness too. We have just launched a new online efficiency benchmarking service that will enable schools to analyse their own performance much more effectively. We recognise that many schools have worked hard up to this point to manage cost base pressures on their budgets, and we will take action this year to provide targeted support to those schools where financial health is at risk, deploying efficiency experts to give direct support to those schools.

The significant investment we are making in schools and the reforms we are introducing underpin our ambition for a world-class education system. Together, they will give schools a firm foundation that will enable them to continue to raise standards, promote social mobility, and give every child the best possible education and the best opportunities for the future.

4.32 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the slight advanced sight of her statement.

I will always be the first to welcome new money for schools. After all, I have spent a year asking the Secretary of State to give our schools the funding they need. It is nice to know I am finally getting through to her. I thank parents, school leaders and teachers across the country for all their work in pushing this issue up the political agenda. Both the Secretary of State and I know that this would not be happening today without them. But, sadly, today's statement raises more questions than it answers.

I welcome the £1.3 billion announced today, but will the Secretary of State confirm whether it will protect per pupil budgets in real terms, or just the overall budget? Astoundingly, this has all been funded without a penny of new money from the Treasury. Perhaps the Chancellor did not want to fund schools, and thought that teachers and teaching assistants were simply more overpaid public servants. I wonder whether the Secretary of State agrees with him. Does her decision to seek savings from the free schools programme mean that she finally agrees with Opposition Members who believe that the programme has always been inefficient? It has always been more expensive than Ministers hoped it would be, so the idea that hundreds of millions of pounds can now be saved seems like a bad joke. Will she simply be honest with the House and tell us all exactly how much money will be cut, from which spending items and who will lose out as a result?

I know that Conservative Members are in full retreat from their own manifesto, but I do not see how this £1.3 billion can possibly fit with it. We were promised £4 billion—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. A kind of group hysteria takes over. Mr Chalk, you are usually a very understated fellow—rather a gentlemanly type, I had always thought. Calm yourself. And you are sitting next to a very senior Member—Prince Andrew over there—who normally behaves as the very embodiment of dignity. Anyway, I am sure you will recover your composure in a minute. You should watch a few Federer matches; you will learn something about composure.

Angela Rayner: Conservative Members are in full retreat from their own manifesto. We were promised £4 billion only a few weeks ago, and now we are getting only £1.3 billion. Can schools expect anything else in future, or is this yet another broken promise?

The Conservative manifesto promised a free breakfast for every primary school pupil. First, the Secretary of State said it would cost £60 million, leaving parents across the country wondering how you can provide breakfast at under 7p per meal. Then she said that it would be £180 million, but that it would go only to the most disadvantaged pupils. She has had plenty of time

to get her figures straight, so can she tell the House whether this is still her policy? How many pupils will benefit, and how much it will cost?

The Secretary of State said that the full funding formula has been delayed again, with local authorities playing a role in setting budgets until 2020. Is this because she has finally acknowledged the role local authorities have to play? Or has she simply realised that to implement her plans fully she would need to pass primary legislation, and that her Government are so weak and wobbly that they cannot even get new money for schools passed through this House?

What the Secretary of State has announced today is nothing more than a sticking plaster. Per pupil funding will still fall over this Parliament unless further action is taken urgently. I will welcome the opportunity to protect budgets for our schools, but this statement alone will do nothing of the kind.

Justine Greening: There is only one party that is in full retreat from its manifesto, and it is certainly not the Conservative party. We heard over the weekend that the promise to students was not worth the paper it was written on. I think it was one of the most dishonest pieces of electioneering I have seen in many, many years. Our young people deserve better than to be peddled some snake oil propaganda that proves to be not true.

I am pleased that the hon. Lady recognises this extra investment. I am shocked to hear that the Labour party has now turned its head on fair funding and suggested it might have voted against introducing the fair funding approach of a hard formula. I think many schoolteachers will be deeply concerned by that change of stance—yet another one.

The hon. Lady talked about getting through to the Conservative party in relation to school funding, but we have been funding schools. I think the message that has not been getting through to the Labour party is that simply loading up more taxes on people and more debt on our country for the young people of the future is not a sustainable way to run the public finances. What the hon. Lady's response shows is that Labour has learned nothing in its time in opposition and has, in fact, gone backwards.

The hon. Lady asked some questions. I can confirm to her that we are, indeed, saying that we are going to have per pupil, real-term protection for the next two years. In relation to the free schools programme, what I was actually setting out—I do not think she properly understood it—was that we are protecting it, but we think we can finance it in a more cost-effective way. She then talked about the £4 billion, not realising, I think, that it was £4 billion over four years. I have set out £2.6 billion over two years. I think she will recognise that that is bringing the process forward at a faster pace, which is something to be welcomed.

One of the hon. Lady's few questions—she did not have a lot of questions to ask—related to the approach we are taking to local authorities. She may have realised—I am not sure from her question—that we were always going to have local authorities use an approach involving a local formula in 2018-19, as it was due to be a transition year anyway. We are simply saying that we want that to extend for a longer time period. Given the historic nature of this change, it is right that we take the

time to make sure that we work at local level to allow local authorities to adjust their funding to start matching the funding formula. However, schools locally will of course be able to see what amount they should be getting. I have no doubt that teachers, parents and governing bodies will raise questions for local authorities that deviate significantly away from the formula settlement that schools think they are entitled to have.

This a strong announcement of additional money combined with making sure that our schools budget is, for the first time in a generation, spread fairly across our schools and our children wherever they are growing up in this country. I hope that the House will broadly welcome it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I call the Chair of the Education Committee, Mr Robert Halfon.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

This news will welcomed by schools, teachers and parents, especially given the additional costs facing schools. In addition to moving money from healthy pupil programmes, my right hon. Friend said that she is redirecting £200 million from the Department's central programmes to the frontline in schools. Which programmes are included?

Justine Greening: We will now go through a process of looking across programmes to identify the £200 million. Across an entire departmental budget of £60 billion, it is reasonable to make sure that my Department and its civil servants have to make efficiency savings in the same way—my right hon. Friend set this out—as we are expecting schools to do. I believe that we can and should do that. The alternative response—simply to dip into taxpayers' pockets every time we want to look at how we increase frontline school spending—is not only unsustainable but wrong when we can do a better job using the money we have got.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): While I welcome this announcement of extra money today, is not the fact that the Government got themselves into such a mess over schools funding an indication of the fact that they have not been straight with people all along—and I am not sure they are being entirely straight with people now? The Secretary of State talks about an increased schools budget but fails to mention that the number of pupils has increased significantly. Is it not the case that, even taking into account the money announced today, when considering per pupil funding the real-terms cuts that schools have faced since 2015 is £2.8 billion, with additional cuts of £8.9 billion, so there is still a massive shortfall? It is about time that the Government started being straight with the figures on the reality of what schools are facing on the frontline.

Justine Greening: I think we are setting out our figures very transparently. The numbers given on the website about school cuts have been worrying parents, but one thing I do not expect to happen as a result of today's funding announcement is for those numbers to be updated because it is far easier just to continue to peddle out-of-date data. The hon. Lady asked about the

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numbers of pupils. She is of course quite right, and that is why I am sure she will welcome the fact that I am saying that real-terms per-pupil funding will be maintained.

Mr Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): This is very good news for schools as they prepare to break up for the summer holidays. May I thank my right hon. Friend for engaging so constructively with colleagues across the House to make this progress? I particularly welcome her focus on bringing up the worst-funded schools, which has been so critically important for so long.

Justine Greening: This is a fundamental change to how we fund our schools and it is extremely challenging to get right. We held a very long consultation and took our time because we want to make sure that this work can take place on the ground. I appreciate that a formula needs to work for all colleagues, not just some, in very different communities up and down the country. That is why we have been listening to what people had to say, and we have reflected that today.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): On Friday I visited Airedale Academy, which this year alone has already had £140,000 cut from its budget. That amounts to £190 per child. Was there anything in the Secretary of State's statement to indicate that it would get any of that money back? Despite being in a deprived coalfield area, our schools are being hit heavily by her funding formula. She has just said that schools will lose. They will get only a 0.5% cash increase per pupil, so will she confirm that that means that a lot of kids will still have a real funding cut? How many pupils will still face a real cut to their funding next year?

Justine Greening: I think that the right hon. Lady will welcome a number of things in the statement. Indeed, she has just pointed out that we will introduce a 0.5% increase per pupil for those schools that are currently above the formula, as opposed to those that need to catch up through additional funding. The position taken by both her party and mine was that there would be no cash losers, and we are going beyond that today. In other words, her school will receive more than it would have done had her party won the election.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): Clearly, more money going to the frontline of schools is a very good thing. Obviously, the devil will be in the detail of the funding formula, which I know well having spent many hours poring over it myself. I want to pick the Secretary of State up on two things. First, on the increase to the percentage allocated to pupil-led factors, she will be aware that many people were unhappy with the overall percentage allocated to basic per-pupil funding. Secondly, many schools in Leicestershire and elsewhere have been historically underfunded for many years, but the allocation of £4,800 per pupil is not the same as the £6,000 per pupil that schools in other parts of the country will get. I fully appreciate that the Secretary of State has to operate within the constraints of responsible public funding, but schools in Leicestershire really need that historical underfunding to be corrected at some point.

Justine Greening: My right hon. Friend will no doubt welcome the fact that today's announcement means that there will be an increase in funding through core

pupil-led factors. I felt it was also right to protect the amount that was already going to children with additional needs, because we want them to catch up. On the overall amount, I assure my right hon. Friend that the formula takes into account the different cost bases in different parts of the country. Today's announcement means not only that schools will get more funding, but that they will catch up faster because of the 3% increase for two years, which replaces the previous proposal of 3% and then 2.5%.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): It is very unclear whether the Secretary of State has dealt with the underlying problems with the funding formula. Nine schools in some of the most deprived parts of Leicester West would have lost out because the Government's initial proposals drastically reduced the amount of money allocated according to deprivation.

Justine Greening *indicated dissent.*

Liz Kendall: The Secretary of State shakes her head, but that is what happened in my constituency. Has the underlying basis of the funding formula been changed, or are schools in the most deprived areas still going to get a bigger cut, harming not helping social mobility?

Justine Greening: We will set out the detail of the national funding formula in September, but it is not true that the deprivation amounts were cut. In fact, as I have said, I actively made sure that they were protected. The hon. Lady will no doubt welcome the fact that, as I said to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the schools in her community that were already well funded are being protected more than they would have been had her party won the election.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and applaud her for listening to the concerns that many of us have expressed about the funding formula for our local schools. At the end of the day, what really matters to schools is the budget that they are going to get. When will schools be told exactly what this will mean for their individual budgets? That is what headteachers, teachers, parents and governors want to know, so when will that information be disseminated? Can she confirm that the promise not to cut funding from any school applies to special schools as well as to mainstream schools?

Justine Greening: Briefly, the local authorities will now go through a process of setting a local formula, but we will confirm the allocation notionally to each school in September. That is a significant process, which involves confirming allocations for around 24,000 schools. Today, I have set out the funding not just for the core schools budget, but for high needs, and I hope that that is good news for my hon. Friend.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Schools in central Bedfordshire that currently get £4,314 per pupil will be very grateful to learn of the new figure of £4,800 per pupil. What can the Secretary of State do to spread best practice across academies regarding covering lessons when teachers are not ill? Some of my academies do this really well. They timetable a bit of extra time in so some staff can cover other staff. Could she have a word about spreading that best practice across all academies so that children do not miss out on lessons?

Justine Greening: I certainly will. One of our biggest challenges and opportunities is to enable best practice to spread more rapidly around our school system. That is one reason why I have introduced so-called research schools, which can be hubs in their local area for disseminating best practice and ensuring that it spreads quickly.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State confirm that protecting per-pupil funding from next year does nothing to reverse the cuts that are leading schools in Exeter to lay off teachers and staff now? What assessment has she made of the impact of raiding her own capital budget on vital improvements, for which many schools in my constituency will now have to wait longer?

Justine Greening: The funding I have set out is indeed for 2018-19, which is when the national funding formula will be introduced. In relation to capital, I simply believe that we can make better use of our budget. Significant funding has been set aside from the sugary drinks industry levy, and we have been able to retain that additional money despite the fact that receipts from the levy were slightly lower than we originally expected. I hope hon. Members welcome the fact that I am therefore pushing that to the frontline.

Mr Speaker: Mistakenly, because I was trying to do two things at once, I called two Government Back Benchers in succession. I would not want there to be a lingering sense of resentment on the Opposition Benches, so I call Mr Christopher Leslie.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I want to press the Secretary of State a little on the point that the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon)—the new Chair of the Select Committee on Education—and some of my hon. Friends have mentioned: where in the Department is the money coming from? It sounds as though the Secretary of State will be robbing Peter to pay Paul from within central programmes. Will she set out a bit more clearly which of these central programmes will be cut: the teaching and leadership college, the standards agency, the mentoring programme, the longer school day programme, the 16-19 budget, university technical colleges or the apprenticeships programme? Or is she promising not to cut any of them?

Justine Greening: It is important to look across the piece to gain additional efficiencies from the Department. The hon. Gentleman talks about cuts, but the reality is that we have to take every single pound of taxpayers' money and get the most out of it. It has struck me how many different pots of money there are across the Department, and we have to make them work more strategically. In doing so, we can unlock funding that can go directly to the front line of schools.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): I welcome the statement and give the Secretary of State 10 out of 10 for progress and a huge gold star for listening to the concerns of Members on the Government Benches and, no doubt, on the Opposition Benches. This morning, I was at the George Spencer Academy, an outstanding academy in my constituency—that is not my view, but the Ofsted rating. The reality is that it will not be replacing eight

teachers and a librarian because of the difficulties with its budget. I hope that today's announcement will go some way towards rectifying that.

The complaint of that academy is not the formula, but its rising costs. There are huge rises in pension and national insurance contributions, which nobody begrudges. Although it is a small part of the piece, I urge the Secretary of State to look at why local authorities are putting the apprenticeship levy on our schools. That cannot be right. It is not a lot of money, but it is very meaningful for school budgets.

Justine Greening: It is important to get on with making more apprenticeships available for young people, including in sectors like education, but I recognise what my right hon. Friend says. It is important that my Department does more to work proactively with schools to help them deal with some of the cost base pressures they have been facing. I feel that best practice can be spread more effectively through schools when they are working out ways to do smart timetabling and smart procurement deals. We need to do that much more systematically in the future and if we do, I believe that we can get much more out of the budget we already have.

Mr Speaker: Order. Pursuant to the plethora of points of order that I took on the subject of HS2 from right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House immediately after questions, I can inform the House that the Secretary of State for Transport would like to make a statement at the moment of interruption—that is to say, at 10 pm—this evening. I have acceded to that request on the basis that the official Opposition are content to hear the statement at that time, and I have received that assurance. There will be a statement, I believe entitled “HS2 Update”, at the moment of interruption tonight. I hope that that is helpful to the House.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): In December last year, the National Audit Office said that the Secretary of State's Department was expecting 8% cuts, which is equivalent to £3 billion, in our school budgets—no one else but her Department. The figure was £24 million across Greenwich schools, which is the equivalent of 672 teachers. She went into the last general election saying that my schools were overfunded. Does she still believe that?

Justine Greening: I do not believe we did say that, but what I can say is that the hon. Gentleman's schools will now get a better settlement under the national funding formula than they would have got under his party.

Mr Speaker: I know that the House will want to be well informed. The moment of interruption would ordinarily be expected to be 10 pm on a Monday, but it is not certain to be at 10. It could be a bit earlier and it could be a bit later. The point that colleagues need to have lodged in their little grey cells is that the statement will come at the moment of interruption. Keep an eye on the annunciator—always a very good piece of advice to proffer to new Members.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Parents and pupils in my constituency will be delighted with the minimum funding of secondary school education, which

[*Antoinette Sandbach*]

will represent a substantial increase in secondary school funding. However, I would be grateful if the Secretary of State outlined the minimum level of funding for primary school pupils, which was not addressed in her statement.

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is right. We will set out more of those details in September. Today, we are setting out the fact that we recognise that there is an issue of minimum funding levels in secondary education, and we would expect that to be reflected in primary education.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Figures from the Secretary of State's Department showed that 21 schools in my constituency were to lose out under her plans for the national funding formula before her announcement today. I am concerned that they still will, so will she guarantee today that those schools that were going to lose out on the basis of the formula no longer will, and that they will actually see gains?

Justine Greening: I think I have been very clear that every school will see gains from the announcement that I have made today, which I hope is good news. It is a reflection of the need to strike a balance between bringing up traditionally underfunded schools and recognising that those receiving higher funding need help to some extent to get on to the national funding formula.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I warmly welcome today's announcement from my right hon. Friend. This is a real moment of celebration for those of us who have been campaigning with the f40 Group for years for a proper fair funding formula. Will she confirm to my governors and headteachers in Gloucestershire that by 2020 all schools currently receiving £3,800 per pupil will be receiving £4,800?

Justine Greening: I have set out that we will have a minimum of around £4,800, which will be transitioned in over these two years. That is good news, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend who has been a tireless campaigner on fair funding. He has done an outstanding job of being very clear with me about his local community concerns and also his desire to see fair funding. It is responding to colleagues like him that has led to the statement today.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): The Secretary of State will know that the National Audit Office said just a few months ago that school budgets needed an extra £3 billion by 2020 to avoid cuts. How does she square that figure with the £1.3 billion that she has announced today over two years? She also knows that the high needs budget—spending on special educational needs—is rising faster than inflation and faster than per pupil numbers. What in this statement will deal with that?

Justine Greening: In answer to the right hon. Gentleman's first point, we are maintaining real-terms funding per pupil, as I have set out today. That sits alongside the other work that we are doing with schools to enable them to unlock efficiencies from the investment that is

already there. I have also set out further additional funding for high needs today, which I hope he will welcome, given his long-term interest in this area.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I hope that my right hon. Friend will accept that the West Sussex MPs who have been working with heads and parents will welcome the progress in her statement. May I say on behalf of the Back Benchers, perhaps the Parliamentary Private Secretary and the Minister for School Standards that we have all worked together and hope to continue doing so to get even more progress in future?

Justine Greening: It has indeed been a team effort to work out how we can best bring forward what is a very difficult thing: a national funding formula that broadly works for many, many different schools across our country, wherever they are, and one that is fair. We have more detail to set out in the autumn, but I hope I have given a clear signal to the House today that we are moving in the right direction and will indeed take this step forward to ensure fair funding.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): The Secretary of State's partial U-turn is bound to be welcome, but given the extraordinary cost pressures that many schools across the borough of Rochdale already face, can she give me a guarantee that none will be forced to cut teachers or teaching assistants over this two-year period?

Justine Greening: There will be higher per-pupil funding in respect of every school in every local area. What we are saying is that we want to be able to give more money to headteachers to enable them to take the decisions that they think are in the best interests of their schools. I have spent many years as a school governor, and I know the work that goes on to make the most of the budgets. I also want to challenge my own Department to make some efficiencies so that we can put that money in the hands of headteachers to spend on the frontline in schools.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I welcome the additional funding for Stockport schools, and I also welcome a very listening Secretary of State. Will she prove her mettle further by taking on board the recommendations on recruitment and retention contained in the report of the Education Committee in the last Parliament?

Justine Greening: This is a vital issue. I think we have more teachers in our school system now than ever before but we need more, and we have to ensure that the teaching profession—I have always seen it as a profession—is a strong career and one in which teachers see continued professional development right the way through and one that is competitive. One of my old teachers up in Rotherham is retiring today, and I have just written him a note to thank him for 45 years of service to children in Rotherham. Teaching is an amazing vocation and one that I would recommend to anyone who cares about developing our young people for the future.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): As other Members have pointed out, the National Audit Office and the Secretary of State's own permanent secretary have highlighted the £3 billion of efficiency

savings that schools were required to make by 2020, including £1.7 billion of savings through what her Department described as

“more efficient use of staff”.

The Secretary of State has now paraded the fact that she is giving £1.3 billion in additional investment. Can she tell us, hand on heart, that she is actually giving more money, or are those efficiency savings continuing as planned?

Justine Greening: This was clearly an announcement of more money. However, as the hon. Lady will recognise, it is important for us to work with schools not only on their non-staff budgets but on their staff budgets. When I talk to headteachers, they are keen to ensure that they are able to use the staff they have as well as they can. We will be working more proactively with schools to help them to understand how they can do that better.

Ms Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): I congratulate the Government on choosing to prioritise school funding, which has been such a huge issue in Tatton and throughout the country. All the Cheshire Members of Parliament have come to my right hon. Friend saying what we need for our local schools, and I therefore welcome today’s announcement. So that everyone can be clear about the position, however, will my right hon. Friend confirm that what she is saying is that there will be a higher per-pupil funding level for every pupil?

Justine Greening: Yes, indeed. We will be making that funding available to local authorities. Ultimately, local authorities will also go through a process of setting their local formulas, but the funding that we are giving them will enable them to do that.

It is fantastic to see my right hon. Friend back in the Chamber. She made a rapid start in representing her community on this issue after returning to the House. It is great to see her. She was, of course, subject to some of the nasty campaigning that I think will be debated in the Chamber later this evening.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): On Friday, Ravenstone Primary School in Balham sent a letter to parents announcing that it was making five essential support staff go. It has also lost a deputy head. If the school had not made those cuts, it would have faced a budget deficit of more than £150,000. Will the Secretary of State pledge that schools in Tooting will be given the necessary funding to maintain current staffing levels, and will she meet me, and the fantastic head of Ravenstone, to discuss the matter in person?

Justine Greening: I pay tribute to the hard work of many teachers, a number of whom I know, in our local borough of Wandsworth, but I think we should also recognise that were that school in a different part of the country at the moment, it would have a very different funding settlement, but would be expected to deliver the same results for local children. What I am saying today is that we want some fairness in our funding formula, and what I have announced will also mean that additional money will indeed go into schools.

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend’s announcement, and I thank her for all her work, but can she confirm that areas such as mine in Medway will benefit from the new funding

formula? We are being charged with building historic numbers of homes in the Medway towns. We are seeing new free schools coming on line, but will we get more? Under Labour, we saw schools shut in the Medway towns.

Justine Greening: It was not just grade inflation and poor standards that we inherited from Labour; it was a schools places crisis. That is why we had to get on with building hundreds of thousands of school places for children who needed them, and that is precisely what we have been doing. This funding formula does indeed mean that my hon. Friend’s local schools will be given higher per-pupil funding, and I assure her that we will not make the mistake made by the Labour party of not planning ahead for the school places that children need in their local communities. We will ensure that they do not end up without those places.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): The Secretary of State’s statement did nothing to address the service and consistent underfunding of 16 to 18-year-olds. Over the last two years, there was an underspend of £267 million. Will the Government commit themselves to reallocating those moneys as soon as possible, and also to addressing the underfunding of 16 to 18-year-olds in the future?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. For too long, post-16 technical education has been put to one side; it now needs to be focused on. That is why the centrepiece of the Budget, from my perspective, was the “skills Budget” that we announced back in March. The CBI called it a “breakthrough Budget for skills”. We are now getting on with that reform, and not just by continuing to bring forward more apprenticeships, but by working with organisations such as the CBI and the Federation of Small Businesses to look at how we can bring forward reforms on T-levels so that every child who chooses to go down the technical route, rather than pursuing a purely academic education, receives a gold-standard education.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for this great news. I have been telling my schools and constituents that she has listened, and today she has proved it. I want to ask for a couple of things. I appreciate that time is very tight and that we are due to hear more in September, but my schools are letting teachers go today. If there is any chance that we could have a heads-up on the figures before September, that would be very helpful. My area can offer expertise on efficiency, because our schools have proved to be more efficient than many across the country. Will she look again at the apprenticeship levy? It does not really work for schools.

Justine Greening: I take my hon. Friend’s point and assure her that we will be working very proactively with schools, particularly those that say they face the biggest challenges. I have put together a team of efficiency advisers who will be able to work directly with schools on the ground. I think that we can make a lot of progress in this area—we need to. I recognise her point about the cost base. It is about ensuring that our apprenticeships strategy really does give opportunities to young people in every single sector, while at the same time ensuring that we get funding to the frontline in schools, and that is what I have announced today.

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): I welcome more funding. Schools such as Derby High in my constituency cannot recruit teaching talent because they face the rising costs of national insurance, an ageing teaching population, the apprenticeship levy and increasing class sizes, and they need new school buildings. Will this new money be enough to address these complicated problems? Will it go far enough to provide the enrichment activities that have all but disappeared in schools, with a whole generation of children from 2010 missing out on such activities because of the imposition of austerity by her Government?

Justine Greening: I know that the hon. Gentleman shares my concern about improving educational standards in Derby, which has been a challenge for many—*[Interruption.]* I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not recognising him—he is obviously the new Member for Bury North. I was going to talk about how important the opportunity area that we have set up in Derby is to me, but I can also assure him that standards in his schools are just as much a priority for me as standards in any other. Today we are trying to set out a way of ensuring that funding is fair for all schools, including the one he mentioned, but it will be complemented by additional funding, which I think he welcomes. That is part of our strategy for improving educational standards, but by no means is it all of it. It is not just about the amount of money we put into schools; it is about what we then do with it and the strategy behind it. As we have seen, education in Wales has been going backwards under Labour because it has no strategy, and as a result children are getting worse standards. We do have a strategy, which is why standards are going up.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: From one James to another—James from Bury to James from Braintree.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): I welcome the Government's delivery on our manifesto commitment to ensure that no school loses out under the national funding formula—it is nice to see that at least one party takes its educational commitments at election time seriously. For clarity, can the Secretary of State confirm to the parents and teachers who were concerned about some of the scare stories that were kicking around in March this year that no school will lose out as a result of the changes in the funding formula?

Justine Greening: I believe that I can, in the sense that we are going beyond saying that no schools will lose out as a result of the formula, and are saying that every school will gain at least 0.5% additional as part of the introduction of the school formula. It is important for me to be clear that the way we are introducing it is through working with local authorities. They therefore will put their own formula—the final allocation—to schools, but we will be very clear that what we are giving them means that no school need lose out, and in fact, further than that, every school should be able to gain.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Warrington is one of the lowest funded authorities in the country, yet schools in my constituency were still losing out under the funding formula the Secretary of State had proposed, and were preparing to sack teachers and

teaching assistants. Can she confirm that she still does not regard these as underfunded schools, and that the 0.5% increase will not meet the costs imposed on them by staff pay rises, the apprenticeship levy and general inflation, and that pupils in those schools will still lose out?

Justine Greening: At this stage, the hon. Lady might be better off lobbying her those on her own Front Bench. What I have set out today will mean that her schools get a better settlement than they would had her own party won—disastrously, in my opinion—the last election.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for listening to the consultation. Dorset has been historically underfunded for many years, so we are all extremely grateful for her announcement today. I have two questions. Can she guarantee to me that special needs will be met and properly funded? Also, I am afraid that I, too, do not agree with the apprenticeship levy; will she consider looking at that again?

Justine Greening: I have set out the fact that this additional funding will also in part flow into high needs, which is important. In relation to the apprenticeship levy, we are working with schools on a teaching apprenticeship, which will not only mean we can have more opportunity, but will enable those schools to be able to use that investment wisely.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State think it is right that schools in my constituency are already having to rely on donations from parents for books, stationery and other basic resources? This is not scaremongering; this is actually happening.

Justine Greening: I would respond in a couple of ways. First, we all recognise that the most important thing for parents is that standards are going up, and indeed they are, as we saw in the most recent key stage 2 results that came out last week. Also, I hope the hon. Lady will recognise that if there have been concerns about funding, this statement is a step in the right direction, because we are saying that we are going to put more into frontline schools. Additionally, I am saying we are going to fund more fairly, something that is long overdue.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): May I mark my right hon. Friend's homework today with a resounding tick and "VG", and may we write in the margin a note to the effect that under her stewardship this Government are spending more on schools than the Labour party ever did? May I ask for her reassurance on a point that I have lobbied her and her Ministers on for some time? Devon has historically been underfunded, so can she assure me that today's very welcome package means that that historical underfunding, which has existed under Governments of all colours, will be corrected? If she can do that today, I will upgrade her to a gold star.

Justine Greening: Well, I think I might be getting upgraded because I can tell my hon. Friend that this will mean additional funding for schools in Devon. I know the debate that has happened in that part of our country. If we are going to have a country that works

for everyone, it is vital that regions like the south-west are able to develop their talent in the same way as any other part of our country, and Devon will indeed benefit from my announcement today.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I remain concerned about the position of the 28 schools in Liverpool, Riverside that were due to lose funding under the Government's formula. Can the Secretary of State assure me that they will not lose any funding from any source, and would she not agree that the £200 million cut to central projects that she announced today is really cutting by the back door?

Justine Greening: I do not agree with the hon. Lady. I can confirm that we are making the additional funding available, including to schools in her community. If any of them get less, that will be the result of a decision by her local authority, which I am sure she will want to follow up. More broadly, we need to recognise that, over time, several different pools of money are rightly directed towards improving schools across our country, and I want to see those working more efficiently. We also need to ensure that parts of my Department are being run efficiently, and the prize for doing that better will be to have more money to channel to frontline schools. That is precisely what I plan to do.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Under the outgoing system, introduced by the previous Labour Administration, schools in West Sussex were among the lowest funded in the country, so I very much welcome the new national funding formula, which will result in a significant enhancement for schools in Crawley. May I seek an assurance, however, that capital funding for projects such as the necessary rebuilding work at Holy Trinity School in my constituency will not be affected as a result of this new revenue coming forward?

Justine Greening: I can assure my hon. Friend that there will be a substantial capital budget, not only to deliver the additional school places that we need but to invest in improving our school estate. As I have set out today, some of the additional money that we had expected from the sugar drinks industry levy can indeed be retained and converted into revenue to go to schools on the frontline. On capital, this Government have invested in the school estate and will continue to do so.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): May I offer to help the Secretary of State to find efficiencies in the budget? No school on its own can take on the unfair and exponentially rising private finance initiative costs, but the Department could lead a challenge to this. Will she help schools in my constituency to do that?

Justine Greening: As part of the consultation on the draft formula, we had to accept that some schools were saddled with PFI commitments put in place by the Labour party. Rather than penalising the schools, we propose to honour those commitments. However, the hon. Lady has raised a genuine point, which is that we need to work with schools with those liabilities and to understand how we can now manage them effectively. We also need to learn from those mistakes, so that we do not saddle schools with more debts and commitments that they cannot afford, like those that were introduced under Labour's failed PFI schemes.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Schools in Corby and east Northamptonshire have been underfunded for far too long, relative to other areas, and I am pleased that my right hon. Friend is putting that right. Will she continue to keep at the forefront of her mind the challenges that rural schools face in relation to their viability, as well as the big challenges that housing growth presents?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend will know that the original consulted formula looked at how schools in more sparsely populated areas could cope effectively and at how we would cope with housing growth when it takes place. I have said that I will respond more fully to the consultation in September, and that response will cover all those points, but he is right to put the issues on the table. We will think carefully about them.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): Many of the primary schools in my constituency are planning to cut staff and, under the new schools funding formula, all but one of our secondary schools will have big cuts in their budgets. If this new formula and the new settlement are so good, will that no longer have to happen?

Justine Greening: The amount of money that the hon. Gentleman's local authority will get in the coming two years will not see any cuts. In fact, as I have said, a 0.5% increase per pupil will be allocated to that community. I reiterate that this is indeed a better settlement for those schools than would have been the case had his party won the election.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I accept that I have been a pain in the butt to both parties over the years. I remember saying to Prime Minister Tony Blair many years ago that the funding postcode lottery between counties was unfair and he agreed, but he did nothing about it. I was also a pain in the butt to the Schools Minister when I gave him a hard time a couple of months ago. I welcome today's announcement, but the Secretary of State will know how much the National Union of Teachers' website has alarmed students and parents over the past few months. When our school funding formula is announced, will it be transparent and available on a website, school by school?

Justine Greening: Indeed it will be, and I hope that the unions will choose to update their websites with accurate data. As the questions today have demonstrated, it is not easy to introduce fairer funding. There are millions of reasons why it is a difficult step for any Government to take, but we have done it because we cannot expect social mobility or strong education outcomes everywhere when our children are funded in such different ways, purely depending on where they happen to grow up. Nobody can accept that if we want to tackle inequality of opportunity, and that is why we are taking these steps. It is complex, but we are doing it because it is the right thing to do.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I welcome any additional funding. There is a lot of concern about the safety of schools following the Grenfell Tower disaster, so will the Secretary of State update me on how many schools in my constituency will be inspected, how that work will be co-ordinated and how any remedial action will be funded?

Justine Greening: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured to know that we have already done a survey across all our schools to identify any that have or think they might have that particular sort of cladding. We have had a good response from schools, and we have been in contact with the handful of Members who have a school in their constituency with cladding that has needed testing. I reassure the House that we were clear to schools with such cladding that fire inspections should be done ahead of any testing of the cladding. We have been through that process now and, for the two schools with positive test results, the fire inspections had already shown that they were safe to continue operating. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to identify the importance of the matter, and I assure the House that working with schools on this has been uppermost in our minds over recent weeks.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I welcome the extra funding for schools in my constituency, especially the extra investment in the core schools budget and the higher per-pupil funding. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the new formula will address the unfairness that has seen some schools in Wealden and across East Sussex remain underfunded for many years?

Justine Greening: Yes, it will. My hon. Friend speaks up tirelessly for her local community on this, and today's announcement will mean more money for that community. I have no doubt that her local authority will now want to ensure that it spreads that money fairly and will set out the notional allocations for schools in the autumn.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May I make a suggestion to the Secretary of State? With the £1 billion earmarked in the Budget for capital funding to extend the free schools programme and the millions that her Department has already written off due to the chaotic funding formula for free schools, would it not be better just to scrap the free schools policy and actually put money into schools, such as those in deprived areas of Hull, that are seeing cuts to teachers and services?

Justine Greening: We need to get a balance between investing in the existing school estate, as the hon. Lady sets out, and planning ahead to ensure that we have school places and schools for children who are coming into our school system, particularly the secondary school system. All that we are saying with free schools is that the long-standing monopoly that councils had on being the only organisations that could introduce a new school into an area should change, and we changed it so that communities can set up their own schools if they want. That is what many have done and that is why we have seen so many free schools established. We will continue with that pipeline so that more of that can happen in the future.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): Like many, I welcome the commitment to the national funding formula. I am also confident that schools in Carlisle will welcome the increase in spending over the next few years. Can the Secretary of State also confirm that the very successful pupil premium funding will continue as is, and that there are no plans for it to form part of the national funding formula?

Justine Greening: I confirm that the pupil premium will be maintained. The pupil premium is important, and it has been a significant driver of how we have managed to begin steadily reducing the attainment gap between children in our country.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Before the election, the Secretary of State would only commit to two years' implementation of the funding formula and would give no commitment to implementing the rest of the formula post-2020. Today's statement refers to a longer transition period. How long will it take to implement the full spending formula changes?

Justine Greening: I will set out our response to the consultation more fully in the autumn. As the hon. Lady says, we will need to come forward with more details. Today I am being clear about the overall level of funding going into schools while also, I hope, giving colleagues reassurance on specific elements before we set out our full plans in September.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. One headteacher has already emailed me to indicate that it will be worth about £300 per pupil. As the Secretary of State will know, Torbay schools have been underfunded for many years due to the inequities in the current funding formula. Can she confirm that the per-school funding amounts will quickly be available so that those schools will not have to rely on a dodgy website?

Justine Greening: Once we have done our analysis over the summer, we will make the per-school spreadsheets available. I hope that people will look at them, because they will contain the actual reality of school funding, rather than some of the falsehoods that are being peddled.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept that, with schools having to pay £575 million in employer contributions to the teachers' pension scheme and £625 million in national insurance contributions, and with inflation at 2.9%, the £1.3 billion that has been announced will barely cover those costs?

Justine Greening: I do not agree. What is important is that we are able to maintain the rates of per-pupil funding in our schools. That is what I have set out today, and we can only do it because we have a strong economy that is creating jobs, growth and taxes that fund our vital public services. We must not fall into the trap of thinking that, every time we want to increase our public spending, we have to reach into the public's pocket and raise taxes. That is simply not sustainable. Neither is it sustainable to have increasing debt when our debt interest is still more than the amounts we are investing every year in our schools and high-needs funding. It is vital that we have a long-term strategy to deal with that debt, and I believe that we can make our departmental budget work more effectively and, in doing so, get more money to the frontline of schools. That has to be the first port of call for anyone in my role, rather than simply resorting to higher taxes or more debt.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): As a parent and a Member of Parliament for a rural constituency, I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. May I urge her,

as the new formula is finessed, to keep at the forefront of her mind the higher cost of staffing and running a school in a rural area, compared with schools in an urban setting? I hope that will be reflected in any formula.

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend has done a good job of raising that issue and setting out his local area's concerns. This was part of the consultation we launched earlier this year, to which we have had 25,000 responses. We have gone through most of them, but we will set out our full response in September. Suffice it to say that I recognise those issues, and I am looking to get it right.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): I appreciate that the Secretary of State does not yet have the details of what she is proposing, but parents and headteachers in my constituency will have listened to her announcement and will be wondering, as I am, what it will mean for our schools. We were expecting cuts of up to £700 per pupil in some of the most deprived schools in my constituency under the fair funding proposals. Can I now go back and reassure my constituents that the funding cuts to all the schools in my constituency will now not go ahead?

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady can be clear about the fact—I hope she will welcome it—that today's statement means there will be higher per pupil funding for every school in her constituency and every local area. I very much hope her local authority passes on those gains directly to schools.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I, too, warmly welcome the Secretary of State's announcement on the fair funding formula, and I declare an interest, as a proud father of three children who will benefit as a result of it. Will she confirm that every parent with children at schools in Dorset and Poole, which have been historically underfunded, will benefit and that no school in my constituency will lose out as a result of her announcement?

Justine Greening: I can confirm that we will give local authorities the funding to make sure that what my hon. Friend has said is indeed the case. That is why this is an important step forward; it will balance the need for more investment in our schools system—which is precisely what we are doing—with making sure it is fairly funded. He represents a community that will benefit from an improved fairness in our funding system.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Trafford has traditionally been an underfunded authority, so I welcome any attempts to introduce a fairer funding formula, but I have particular concerns about whether funding will continue to reach schools that have a high proportion of high-needs students. We are already seeing de facto rationing, as parents are experiencing long delays for statements—or they are not getting them at all. Can the Secretary of State reassure me that in developing this funding formula the exceptional needs of those high-needs children will always be protected and they will not pay the price for an attempt to even up the playing field across the piece?

Justine Greening: This statement will mean more money going into the high-needs budget, which I hope the hon. Lady will welcome. It is also worth reflecting

on the fact that more generally within the formula I have been careful to ensure that money will follow children who are going into primary and secondary already behind, in order to help them to catch up. We looked at this in several different ways to make sure that no child was not getting the appropriate amount of investment. My concern in doing all of this was the fact that a child growing up in her community would get a very different amount invested in them than they would if they had grown up in a very different part of the country. That is iniquitous and we need to change it. I am delighted to be able to say that we are introducing fair funding, so we will change that for the better.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on today's statement. Schools in my constituency will be delighted to hear that per-pupil funding is being protected in real terms, and taxpayers in my constituency will be delighted to hear that it is being done through departmental efficiencies. Does she agree that paying for this by putting additional borrowing on to future generations really would be robbing Peter to pay Paul?

Justine Greening: I totally agree with my hon. Friend; none of these steps are easy. It would be far easier simply to put up tax, which is what the Labour party wants to do. That is not the right thing to do—never more so than now, given some of the challenges our country faces. We need to make sure we use the money that we are already getting efficiently, which is precisely what I have set out today. As I have said, the prize for doing that is to be able to put more money to the frontline of schools.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): When the Minister for School Standards met a cross-party delegation of Cumbrian MPs as recently as March, he was clear with us that it was necessary and fair for the schools budget overall, after having been protected, to now play its part in the Government's strategy of deficit reduction. Was he right or was he wrong?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman is trying to get some politics out of what is basically a sensible announcement that I have made on more funding for schools. I am interested in what we are doing practically to improve education, rather than in the politics around it.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and her Ministers for taking so much time to listen to my concerns about Cheltenham's schools and the concerns of £40 schools up and down the country affected by historic unfairness. This is a huge step forward. Will she confirm that every secondary school in Cheltenham will receive at least £4,800 per pupil regardless of additional needs funding for which individual pupils might be eligible?

Justine Greening: I have set out today that we will put in a floor of £4,800. I think that that is important. I should put on the record my tribute to my hon. Friend and the campaign setting out his local community's concerns in Cheltenham. He has done a very good job of being clear about local needs, and that has helped form today's statement.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Many young people in Bristol choose to go to St Brendan's Sixth Form College in my constituency rather than stay on at their school sixth forms. Will the Secretary of State categorically assure us that those pupils will benefit from fairer funding? At the moment their choices are being restricted, as are their facilities, because of cuts to sixth form colleges.

Justine Greening: Today's statement is, of course, about the core schools budget and high needs funding. There will be higher per pupil funding for every school and every local area. That will enable schools to do a better job in their local provision. The hon. Lady sets out some of the challenges of sixth form funding, but I want to reassure her and the House that we are absolutely committed to ensuring that children stay in a well-funded school system. I know that Bristol has successfully focused on education in recent years, and it is important that we work together to see that success continue.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): This statement will be welcomed by parents across Nottinghamshire and I know that the Labour party will be outside the school gates in my constituency once again, helping us to disseminate the good news. May I press the Secretary of State on free schools? I am glad that she is still committed to them, and we in Newark have seen the absolutely transformational effects of a good free school on a community. Will she confirm today that all the free schools due to open either this September or next September, including the brilliant one in Newark, the Southers School, will open?

Justine Greening: Absolutely. There is a strong pipeline of free schools and we are getting on with things in that regard. Indeed, more than that, what I have said today is that we are underwriting the next 140, and I am simply setting out that I think we can deliver that more cost-effectively. The reward is to release additional funds for the frontline of schools, including in constituencies such as my hon. Friend's.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): I welcome the additional investment that has been announced today, but the Secretary of State will know that statements made by Ministers during the last Parliament on core funding and the national funding formula will already have been factored into schools' three-year business plans. As a result, schools in Greenwich and Woolwich and other constituencies will already have started to restructure and, in many cases, to lay off teaching and support staff. Will the Secretary of State confirm that there is nothing in today's statement that undoes the damage already done by the Government's direction of travel?

Justine Greening: The direction of travel, including in schools in London, has been towards higher standards. The real challenge is improving school standards across the country, so I hope that we will continue to travel in that direction. Having been a governor, I am sure that the additional funding I have set out today will be spent by schools, as and when they receive it.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): May I push the Secretary of State for a little more guidance on how local authorities will allocate the money? In particular,

will she allow hon. Members on both sides of the House who have become more involved with spreadsheets and schools than they would care to be to be involved in the process so that we can identify which schools have an unfair deal within the LEA?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend raises an important point. What will now happen is what happens every year: local authorities will consult on a formula to spread the money they will receive around the school system. We have made sure that, for the first time, as of 2018-19, that amount will be fair, unlike in the past, and I encourage Members from all parties to work with local authorities as part of that consultation process to ensure that they feel that the money is being fairly spread. I will be clear that there is an indicative budget for every single school from 2018-19 onwards and I am sure that local authorities that do not want to pass that amount of money to schools will be asked why that is so.

Mr Speaker: I call Mims Davies.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Thank you, Sir; lucky me. In my constituency surgery on Friday parents once again raised the issue of high needs with me, so I thank the Secretary of State for this statement, especially for its focus on that area. As she is being so bold, will she look at nursery funding, and post-16 funding, which we have heard about today, where standards can really make a difference to our children's generation?

Justine Greening: I reassure my hon. Friend that we have done so. Indeed, she knows that there has never been more additional investment in early years than under this Government. The good news is that the quality of early-years provision is getting better; that is to be welcomed, and it can, over time, significantly shift the dial on social mobility.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): I warmly welcome the statement from the Secretary of State, which will benefit all schools in Harborough, Oadby and Wigston. I further welcome the fact that the funding is coming from efficiencies within the Department, rather than unfunded borrowing. There has been an excellent announcement that she will invest an extra £500 million a year in technical education. Will she confirm that today's measure is not being funded by any raid on that, because it is an important reform?

Justine Greening: I take this opportunity to welcome my hon. Friend to the House. We are committed to pushing on with that Budget announcement. I am absolutely determined to make sure that that this really will be "a breakthrough Budget for skills", as the CBI described it. We have had excellent engagement with employers on technical education since we set out our broader strategy. I assure my hon. Friend that the investment will be flowing in.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, Rachel Maclean.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I join hon. Members in welcoming this announcement from my right hon. Friend the Secretary

of State. Schools in Redditch such as the Ipsley RSA Academy, whose pupils I have just been hosting in Parliament, will also welcome it. In Redditch, we have a three-tier education system. Can she confirm that the three-tier system will benefit from her announcement, just as the two-tier system will?

Justine Greening: I can confirm that the announcement will mean higher per-pupil funding for every school in my hon. Friend's community. That is good news for Redditch, and I hope that it will see continued improvements in standards.

Point of Order

5.47 pm

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker. On Friday, I was meant to meet the hard-working staff of Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service in Bennett House in my constituency. Bennett House is leased by the Ministry of Justice and is scheduled for closure, and I was meeting staff who have concerns about those plans in my capacity as the local Member of Parliament. The meeting had to be moved, as MOJ officials informed staff that I would not be allowed on site, and that if I tried to get on site I would be prevented from doing so. I seek your guidance on how best I can raise this matter with the Ministry of Justice, and seek to ensure that other Members of Parliament are uninhibited by the Ministry in going about their constituency duties.

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman—a new, or new-ish, Member of the House—is alleging a breach of privilege, that is properly raised with me in writing. I would then in turn address the matter in writing. However, as he has not specifically used that term or made that allegation, but complained of what might be called—in his mind, certainly—an unreasonable prevention, or some sort of let or hindrance, this is not strictly a point of order for me as Chair of the House. That said, I am rather concerned to hear that a Government Department has prevented his access to a Government building in his constituency. The hon. Gentleman has made his concern clear, and it is on the record. This is ultimately a matter for Ministers to determine, but let me say without fear of contradiction and very explicitly that this is pretty obviously an unhelpful attitude on the part of a Government Department, and I would hope that a Minister would direct the Department not to obstruct a Member going about constituency business in that way.

BILL PRESENTED

HIGH SPEED RAIL (WEST MIDLANDS - CREWE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Grayling, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Greg Clark, Secretary Michael Gove, Secretary David Mundell and Secretary Alun Cairns, presented a Bill to make provision for a railway between a junction with Phase One of High Speed 2, near Fradley Wood in Staffordshire, and a junction with the West Coast Main Line near Crewe in Cheshire; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 6) with explanatory notes (Bill 6-EN).

Scheduling of Parliamentary Business

Emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

5.50 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the scheduling of parliamentary business by the Leader of the House and the implications of a two-year session for Standing Orders requirements.

Mr Speaker, I thank you for agreeing that this debate should take place. This is not a debate about a debate. It is about an important point of principle: our parliamentary democracy and the role of this House. It is about the Opposition and other Members holding the Government to account, and it is about the sovereignty of Parliament. This House is not supine. Our constituents—the electorate—expect us to be here. They voted for us, in the official Opposition's case, to set up our programme for change. This minority Government are not working.

The Standing Orders are set out in the Blue Book. Rules and procedures have to be consistent, certain and clear. What does the book say about Opposition days? Standing Order 14 says:

"Twenty days shall be allotted in each session for proceedings on opposition business, seventeen of which shall be at the disposal of the Leader of the Opposition and three of which shall be at the disposal of the leader of the second largest opposition party".

[*Interruption.*] Will Government Members hang on a second? Given the Government's announcement of a two-year Session, references to Sessions in Standing Orders should be interpreted as per year, with dates allocated pro rata.

The Government announced by press release:

"Rare two-year Parliamentary session...Double the length of a normal Parliamentary session".

Therefore, the implication of those plain words is that the number of days would be doubled.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The hon. Lady does not realise how lucky she is. When we were in opposition, we did not have the benefit of this Speaker in the Chair to call urgent questions with the frequency that he does now to the huge advantage of the House. We would have traded any number of Opposition days for the wisdom of the current Speaker—long may he remain in the Chair. By the time hon. Members actually get to an Opposition day debate, the Gallery is empty and the journalists have all pushed off having written their copy.

Mr Speaker: I am overcome with excitement. I am going to get very emotional in a moment. We are grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.

Valerie Vaz: That intervention deserves no response whatever; I am really sorry.

Wait for this: in the 2010-12 Session, extra days were provided for business. Once the 20 Opposition days provided for in the Standing Orders had been allocated, a further 14 unallotted days were provided. We need certainty. The Government have not provided for an Opposition day before the summer recess, making the earliest Opposition day in September 2017. This means a staggering eight months—nearly as long as it takes to have a baby—without a single Opposition day, denying vital scrutiny of Government business. As you know,

Mr Speaker, the last Opposition day was on 25 January. At the same point into the parliamentary Session in 2010-12, the Opposition were granted three Opposition days, and five in the 2015 Session.

We need to be clear. At business questions last week, the Leader of the House said in response to a question—not to me, although I did ask—that a date was offered in September. I was not aware of this Opposition day, whether through the usual channels or the usual suspects, so we need to clarify what a Session is. It is now two years, but we would not expect one year's worth of Opposition days to be allocated over those two years. Why is this important? Today is the 18th day that the new Parliament has been sitting. So far, legislation has been discussed only on four of those days for a total of just under 13 hours.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): The hon. Lady says that a Session should last one year. Why, then, were there only 20 days in the 1997-98 Session, which lasted 18 months? In 2001, there were only 20 days. In the 2005 Session, which lasted 18 months, there were also only 20 days.

Valerie Vaz: The hon. Gentleman clearly was not listening. The Standing Orders state exactly what a Session is, and the Government have extended it.

Why is this important? Decisions have to be made on important matters that affect our country. So far, the Government have been pushed to give us an answer. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) had to table an amendment to the Queen's Speech. Last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) had to secure an emergency debate on contaminated blood to set up an inquiry, to which the Government conceded only just before the start of the debate.

As is the usual convention, I have asked the Leader of the House several times for a debate on the Social Security (Personal Independence Payment) (Amendment) Regulations 2017, the Higher Education (Basic Amount) (England) Regulations 2016 No. 1205 and the Higher Education (Higher Amount) (England) Regulations 2016 No. 1026, which have been prayed against. Time was given on 19 April but, given the interruption of the election, no time has been offered for that debate. The failure of this Government to allow a debate and a vote on the regulations has created growing uncertainty for students starting university or continuing their studies in the coming academic year. Will the Leader of the House confirm that the regulations have not been enacted and that there will be no increase for students in September? Paragraph 5 of schedule 2 to the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 states that for any increases in the higher amount of tuition fees, it would be necessary that

"each House of Parliament has passed a resolution".

That has not been enacted yet, so have the Government sneaked this in under another Act and betrayed our young people?

This Government are just not working. There has been no justice for the 1950s women—an issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) last week. My hon. Friends the Members for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) and for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), and the hon. Member

for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), have all raised this important issue, as have many Conservative Members.

We need a debate and a votable motion on the health service. There has been a 23% fall in nursing applications. As the shadow Health Secretary said today, more than 12,000 surgical procedures on children and young people were cancelled last year—an increase of 35%. GPs are now charging for visits; that is obviously an end to the national health service as we know it.

A decision has to be made on the Swansea tidal lagoon before the end of July. I have a letter here that has been signed by 107 Members from all parties, asking that the Hendry review is put into effect. I also raised that matter at business questions.

The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill has now been published, and a number of statutory instruments will flow from it. Clauses 7 to 9 of the Bill all state:

“A Minister of the Crown may by regulations make such provision as the Minister considers appropriate”.

It is about Ministers having the power to do what they want. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union deflects this point. He said that if a statutory instrument is before the House, the House of Commons decided whether it debates it and votes on it. He said that that is in the call of the House of Commons and, patronisingly,

“it is what they call a statutory instrument which is, can be debated, can be voted on.”

Sorry, I cannot get his voice right.

The Secretary of State thinks that we should be debating. When was the last time the Leader of the House actually spoke to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union? The minority Government are not working.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Valerie Vaz: No. The hon. Lady will get the same answer that Mr Speaker would give—it is up to me to decide whether I give way. I just want to proceed.

Then there is the question of the days allocated for private Members' Bills: 13 have been allocated up until November 2018—that is 18 months, although the current Session lasts for two years. Why have no Opposition days been allocated? Are the Government scared of the Opposition? No dates have been agreed for Backbench Business debates, despite the diligence of the Opposition in having a Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

I repeat the Prime Minister's words: “debate and discussion” are

“the hallmarks of our parliamentary democracy”,

although it seems that her Cabinet are busy trying to push her out. The Government need to know that, for our democracy to thrive, the citizens of this country need to have faith that their MPs will represent their views and not be disfranchised. It is vital for democracy to have debates when required by convention, and for the Opposition to set out what they stand for. The electorate need to see us at work—to see the rhetoric turned into action.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Valerie Vaz: No, I am going to proceed.

If the Government truly believe in the rule of law, where Parliament, the Executive and the judiciary all play their part in upholding our democracy, the Leader of the House has to honour the interpretation of Standing Orders, clarify them, grant debates and uphold conventions in this Session. The key question is, is this in the public interest? The answer is a resounding yes.

6.1 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. I know that you, Mr Speaker, have granted it with your usual focus on ensuring that Back-Bench voices can always be heard and on handling the creative tension between Back Benchers and the Government's right to schedule their own business. I am sure the temptation to be a bit teary after the example of centre court yesterday will never overtake you, but we are all grateful to you for granting this debate.

The debate gives me the chance to say that the business brought to this House since the general election is quite simply business as usual. As the House would expect, I will expand on that. As always happens after a general election, the House is getting itself in order so that the business can run smoothly.

Many important debates have already taken place. Last week, we had a vital debate on the Grenfell inquiry. Many powerful points were raised by Members on both sides of the House. It is right that we prioritised giving time to such a catastrophic and tragic event. This week, we are having a general debate on what more can be done to eradicate the evil of drug misuse. Today we are scheduled to have a debate on the intimidation and abuse of candidates in the general election—abuse that challenges the very heart of our democratic process—but it is now under threat because of this debate.

Those, to me, seem perfect examples of our parliamentary democracy working well, with lots of opportunities for debate. The Opposition would do well to explain to the House which of those debates they consider to be unimportant to the millions in the country who are relying on us to improve their lives.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): The Leader of the House has mentioned the need to be creative. When I raised a point of order about the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign, which we debated in a packed Westminster Hall on 5 July, the response was that Members need to be innovative. Well, if we have no Backbench Business time and no Opposition days, and if there is a refusal to have a votable motion, so that we cannot vote and express an opinion, how on earth can we air this important issue, which is of concern to not just me and other Opposition Members but Conservative Members, and have it resolved?

Andrea Leadsom: I am delighted that there have already been five debates on this important issue and that there were six days of debate on the Queen's Speech where the Opposition chose the subjects they wanted to debate. There have been plenty of opportunities to debate whatever the Opposition want.

In addition, urgent Government legislation has been introduced, including the Air Travel Organisers' Licensing Bill and the European Union (Approvals) Bill, and there are a further 22 Bills in the Queen's Speech, which will be brought forward during this Session.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The bottom line is that the Government have essentially halved the number of days of debate the Opposition can nominate. How is that good for democracy?

Andrea Leadsom: That is simply not true, and I will come on to that if the hon. Gentleman will give me the chance.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend should take no lectures from the Labour party, which, when in government, reduced Prime Minister's Question Time from twice a week to once a week and introduced the regular guillotining of Bills, thereby reducing debating time.

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend is exactly right to make those points. I want to be very positive and to talk about what we are doing.

We have been mindful of Back Benchers. As requested by the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, we have rescheduled some of the debates that were agreed before dissolution. I am pleased that we have already found time for some of those debates, including on the ongoing challenge of seeking peaceful coexistence between Israel and the Palestinians.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): With regard to the intervention by—and I do mean this—my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight), is it not the case that when the arrangements for Prime Minister's questions were changed, there was no change to the amount of time for them, because the two 15-minute sessions were consolidated into one 30-minute session, which now regularly lasts about 45 minutes, so, in fact, there is more time than ever for Prime Minister's questions?

Andrea Leadsom: I would certainly agree that, under your watchful eye, Mr Speaker, Prime Minister's questions has become quite a lengthy experience, which I am sure we are all the better for.

Most Select Committee Chairs have now been elected, and elections to the Committees themselves will take place as soon as possible. The House will also know that sitting Fridays have been announced.

Given the outrage affected by the Opposition, we would be forgiven for thinking that there had been no opportunities at all for them to have their voices heard. However, in addition to the six days given to the debate on the Queen's Speech out of the 18 sitting days in this term so far—that is 40% of the time—where topics for debate were, of course, chosen by the Opposition, there have been two debates under Standing Order No. 24, six urgent questions, 14 Adjournment debates in this Chamber, 15 departmental oral question times, 16 oral statements, 24 debates in Westminster Hall and—I am sure the shadow Leader of the House would not wish to forget this—the four feisty business question sessions we have had in this Chamber.

It is therefore certainly not the Government's fault if the Opposition have failed to make good use of those many opportunities. They will be aware that an Opposition day debate has been offered via the usual channels for after the summer recess, in September.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): The Leader of the House says that the Committees will be elected in due course. The Labour party has carried out its elections today, and those Committee members will be in place tonight. How soon can we expect the Government to sort out their side of the equation?

Andrea Leadsom: As soon as possible, and within the normal timeframe for establishing Select Committees.

The Opposition make a comparison with the 2015 general election, saying that, by the summer recess following the vote, Select Committees had been established and Opposition days had been held. However, the election in 2015 was in May, not June, and there were 32 sitting days between the Queen's Speech and the summer recess. Between the Queen's Speech and the summer recess this year, there will have been only 18 sitting days.

Let us look at our record on providing Opposition day debates versus the record when the Labour party was in government. Let us use the Opposition's assumption that each Session should be one year and that there should be 20 Opposition days each year. On their reckoning, between 1997 and 2010, when Labour was in office, Opposition parties were short by 35 Opposition days. By the same calculation, and using the Opposition's assessment, they have had one more day than their allocation between 2010 and today.

Chris Bryant: I have to say that it is a bit rich of the Leader of the House to give us the number of days between the Queen's Speech and the recess, since the Government set the date of the recess and delayed the date of the Queen's Speech. In 1997, how many days were there before the recess? Two. In 2001? One. In 2005? Five. In 2010? Two—and that is when the Conservatives had to cobble together a ludicrous Government. In 2015? Five. So she is talking through a hole in her head. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: It may have been a case of mistaken identity, but I thought I detected a Somerset burr in the voice saying, "Order." My judgment is that what the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) has said was not disorderly; whether it was in entirely good taste is a matter for people's judgment. However, the Leader of the House is a robust character, and I think she is unfazed. The only other observation I make at this stage—the Leader of the House has referred to me a number of times—is that, just as a point of fact, the tears in my eyes on Centre Court yesterday were tears of joy for the greatest of all time.

Andrea Leadsom: I felt sure, Mr Speaker, that were you to feel a bit emotional today, they would of course be tears of joy as well, so I am not inconsistent. As for the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), he may be technically correct, but he is extremely rude.

In the extended parliamentary Session of 2010-12, we provided extra days for private Members' Bills. The Standing Orders set out that electing the Chairs of Select Committees is a matter for political parties to agree on. Again, Chairs of Select Committees have been elected just as quickly as in previous Parliaments.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): It seems to me that this is descending into a rather pointless debate about what may or may not have happened in the past. Surely it is possible to get to an agreement. It is right

that we give the Opposition a chance to hold the Government to account. Surely, through the usual channels, we can ensure that, despite the fact that we have a two-year rather than a one-year Session, in broad equivalence they get the same number of supply days.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is exactly right. That is indeed what we are talking about, which is why I opened my remarks by saying that this is absolutely business as usual.

Victoria Atkins: Does my right hon. Friend share my regret that this debate about debates is potentially eating into the time to talk about the very serious issue of intimidation of parliamentary candidates in the election? I see that Opposition Members are sniggering. Do they not take democracy as seriously as me? I am concerned that we are eating into that important debate later this evening to talk about our diaries.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is exactly right. This is a debate about process. It is not about material things, and it is certainly not about things that our constituents care about.

In terms of respecting parliamentary supremacy—something that I know is very dear to you, Mr Speaker—let us look at the performance of my party versus the Opposition. Who created the Backbench Business Committee in 2010? My party. Who brought in elections to Select Committees? My party. Who introduced the e-petition system? My party. So in fact this Government—this party—have done far more for parliamentary supremacy than the Opposition have. So far, over 10 million people have signed various petitions, the Government have formally responded to 264 petitions, and 20 petitions have been scheduled for debate. The Government have also responded to 162 urgent questions in this House since 2015 alone.

This urgent debate is the result of party politics at its worst. Nearly 13 million people voted for Labour to come to this place and represent them. I do not believe they were voting for petty time-wasting by Labour. All the Opposition are doing is talking about process when what is important is policy. The Opposition say they want to talk about tuition fees—well, let us talk about tuition fees. We are committed to supporting all young people to reach their full potential, whether that means going to university, starting an apprenticeship, or taking up a technical qualification. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are now going to university at a record rate—up by 43% since 2009. But Labour Members are in a total mess over the pledge they made to students just seven days before the general election—a pledge they have now admitted would cost £100 billion, and was just an “ambition”, according to the shadow Chancellor. They should be upfront with young people about their plans. Is it still their policy to cancel all student debt, or was it a pre-election scam?

Or perhaps Labour Members would like to talk about the economy. This Government have shown determination to live within our means so that the next generation are not saddled with the debts of 13 years of Labour recklessness. We inherited the largest peacetime deficit ever from Labour, but since—

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This debate is about Opposition days and our ability to hold the Government to account. If the Leader of the House wants debates about the subjects she is now referring to, why does she not allow them rather than diverting from what this debate is about?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is aware that Front Benchers are usually accorded a modest latitude in developing their arguments, hence I have allowed a modest latitude, but I think the Leader of the House will shortly return to the thrust of the matter under debate—not what might have been under debate but what is under debate. I know that she will focus on that; I am perfectly sanguine on that score.

Chris Bryant: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I do not think there is a “further”, but I will indulge the hon. Gentleman.

Chris Bryant: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the House has said quite categorically that she believes that the debate we are having now is completely irrelevant and the far more important one will take place later on. I just wonder, because I noticed the number of Conservative Members who stood to catch your eye earlier, whether you think that more Conservative Members would like to take part in this debate or in the debate that the Government have scheduled for later tonight.

Mr Speaker: The answer is that lots of Members are wanting to speak today. In this debate, which can last for a maximum of three hours, a lot of Government Back Benchers wish to speak. I am keen to accommodate both Government Back Benchers and Opposition Back Benchers, and I am certainly keen to accommodate would-be maiden speakers. Therefore, if we can now minimise points of frustration and focus on the debate, I think that would be beneficial to all concerned.

Andrea Leadsom: I was going to continue, Mr Speaker, to talk about the way we have sought to improve our ability to live within our means, and the amazing employment record of this Government, in an effort to get the Opposition to focus on what really matters. Nevertheless, I will not bother to talk about employment, but will continue on to the Opposition’s desire to consider process.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend note the glorious irony that the Opposition have called for an emergency debate, and as soon as we debate anything they wish it to be curtailed?

Andrea Leadsom: Yes, I think my hon. Friend speaks for all of us in his observation.

I have outlined the many opportunities that the Opposition have had since the general election to debate in this House. In four days, the House rises for recess, but not before there are many further opportunities to put their views on the record. Today we are supposed to be debating the abuse and intimidation of candidates during the general election. Members on both sides of this House have been victims of vile abuse from anarchists

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

and hard-left activists, but obviously Labour Members are not interested. It is now unlikely that there will be any time for that critical debate to take place today. I sincerely hope that the Leader of the Opposition, having prevented this debate, will want to condemn in the strongest language the frightening and intimidating abuse endured by many Conservative Members, as well as a number of those on his own Benches.

This Government are working towards a brighter future for our great country. We are bringing forward the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and negotiating our exit from the European Union, fulfilling the will of the British people, and working to make a success of Brexit. We are putting in place a strong programme of social and economic legislation, introducing measures that will improve mental health provision, build the industries of tomorrow, and stamp out extremism and terrorism. These are issues that matter—

Mr Kevan Jones: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I have to take it on trust, but I hope it is a point of order rather than a point of frustration.

Mr Jones: I know that you were deep in conversation, Mr Speaker, but the Leader of the House has returned to issues that have nothing to do with this debate. She is just giving a long list of what this Government have achieved. If she really wants those issues to be properly aired, why will she not give us Opposition day debates so that we can vote on them?

Mr Speaker: I note the hon. Gentleman's point. As far as I can tell—I hope I sense correctly—the Leader of the House is very likely approaching her peroration. A lot of Members wish to speak and there is usually a rough equivalence between the length of time taken by the Opposition spokesperson and the Government spokesperson. At this stage the right hon. Lady is in order, but I imagine that she is probably nearing the conclusion of her remarks.

Andrea Leadsom *rose*—

Mr Jones: Go on, get on with it!

Mr Speaker: Order. There was no need for that. It is rather ungracious of the hon. Gentleman to yell from a sedentary position. He can always adopt a gentle burr, like the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), which is altogether more seemly.

Andrea Leadsom: Opposition Members are certainly not being very charming this evening, are they? I was trying to outline some of the issues that really matter to the people of our great country. It is in the interests of our country that this Government provide certainty, continuity and control, as we forge a new and successful future for the whole of the United Kingdom. I hope that colleagues agree that the safety, welfare and prosperity of this country should be our priority, and I will work with all willing colleagues across the House to achieve that.

6.21 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): We welcome this debate and share the concerns about the arrangements for this parliamentary Session over the next two years. We agree that clarity is needed on the scheduling of Back-Bench and Opposition business.

Since we have come back, the pace at which the House's usual arrangements have been put back in place has been woeful and unsatisfactory. There are only three full days left until the long summer recess, yet this House's Select Committees are still not up and running, nor do we know the arrangements for its Standing and Statutory Instrument Committees. Given that they are going to be particularly burdened by the repeal Bill, we need clarity and certainty about them.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I think I heard earlier that neither the Scottish National party nor the Labour party has yet agreed on its own members for Select Committees—

Valerie Vaz: We have!

Lucy Frazer: I am sorry if I am in error, but it is only recently that it has been possible to agree on Select Committee membership and we are about to go into recess.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for her intervention, because I can say with certainty that we are ready to supply SNP names for Select Committee membership, and I am pretty certain that the Labour party is in the same position.

You made a generous offer last week, Mr Speaker, to help facilitate arrangements for any political party that is finding it difficult to arrange its membership of Select Committees, but I do not know whether the Conservative party has approached you to fulfil that promise. It is not the Labour party or the SNP that is holding up the creation of Select Committees, but the Conservative party, so I ask it to make use of your very kind offer.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Could it be that so many Conservative Members want to take part in Select Committees that an election is required, and that a similar level of interest does not exist among Opposition parties?

Pete Wishart: I say candidly to the hon. Gentleman: get on with it, for goodness' sake. The Select Committees should be up and running before the summer recess. If the Conservatives cannot do that themselves, they should accept your offer to help them arrange it, Mr Speaker.

Kevin Brennan: I shall call the hon. Gentleman my hon. Friend. The Labour party has already held elections for Select Committee places. If the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) thinks the Conservative party is going to have difficulties arranging its own membership, we could provide it with election observers and tellers.

Pete Wishart: I shall call the hon. Gentleman my hon. Friend, too. He makes a very good suggestion. How about we make use of the Office of the Speaker? We could send observers along to help facilitate the Conservative party's arrangements; and then let us get on with it, for goodness' sake. We are three days away from the summer recess. Let us get these things in place.

Sir Edward Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman because I like him.

Sir Edward Leigh: The SNP was granted the Chairs of two Select Committees. I cannot quite understand how it was that Members of all the other parties were entitled to vote for different candidates, which was very democratic, but SNP Members were given just one candidate for each post, which seems rather Stalinist. Can the hon. Gentleman explain that?

Pete Wishart: That is because they were superb candidates, particularly the nominee for Chair of the Scottish Affairs Committee.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I cannot resist the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman has left out the amazing abilities of the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil).

Pete Wishart: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has reminded me of that. How could I forget my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar?

Chris Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: This will be the last intervention I take for a while, because we need to make some progress.

Chris Bryant: I just wanted to say that votes are still being cast for Labour membership of the Foreign Affairs Committee, so if any Labour Members have not yet voted, they have until 8.30 to do so. [*Interruption.*]

Pete Wishart: I think I am grateful for that intervention. It seems to have energised Conservative Members, so it must have been particularly good.

It is not as if this Government have been over-exercised or energised by business thus far. Perhaps unfairly, this Parliament has already been dubbed the zombie Parliament, but I think that that comparison gives the flesh-eating undead a bad name. This is turbo-charged political zombie-ism, but a curious type of zombie-ism, because the Government are not only tearing flesh from the public but starting to consume themselves. If we look around Whitehall, we see that what passes for normal discourse among Secretaries of State amounts to briefing and counter-briefing. I say to the Leader of the House that this is what happens when Governments do nothing—bad stuff happens. This is a Government at war with itself, where briefing and counter-briefing take precedence as they all jostle and compete to be the next captain of the SS Tory Titanic.

According to one anonymous Minister, the Chancellor is trying to “stymie” Brexit. If only he would get on with it! Apparently he believes that Brexiteers are a “bunch of smarmy pirates”, whatever a smarmy pirate is. I have an image in my head of a cross between Captain Pugwash and Jack Sparrow re-enacting the battle of the Thames between Nigel Farage and Bob Geldof. I do not know what a smarmy pirate is but—shiver me timbers and pieces of eight—I wouldn't mind being one myself.

The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) says that the plotters should “just shut up for goodness' sake”,

which would deprive this House of so much comedy value. The International Trade Secretary says that members of the Cabinet “should drink less prosecco”. And there was I thinking, “Cheap prosecco? Surely only the finest champagne is good enough for my Conservative friends.” According to the Transport Secretary, there is nothing to see here, concluding:

“We're not a group of clones.”

Well, thank goodness for that. It is no wonder that the Government do not want scrutiny when they are in such chaos and turmoil.

I agree with the Leader of the House on one thing, namely the question of public enthusiasm for this debate. During my surgeries over the weekend, I did not notice any banners calling for more Opposition days for the Labour party or for sorting out the membership of statutory Committees. The issue is important, however, and I think that our constituents expect us to come down here to ensure that we arrange the optimal conditions for debate and scrutiny and get on with the job of ensuring that this Government are held to account.

This is a very different type of Parliament. Perhaps that will excuse the Government's behaviour in not getting things back in place. I do not think there has been such uncertainty about a Parliament lasting a full term since the 1970s and the days of Callaghan and Wilson. The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 has proved to be possibly the biggest waste of parliamentary time in history. It was supposed to give certainty to the scheduling of parliamentary debates, but it was always going to fail when a Government wanted to have an early election, assisted by an Opposition who would not be able to resist.

We therefore have a Parliament and Government on political life support, always requiring emergency treatment and always vulnerable to the infection of events as they try to define some sense of purpose and meaning. The Government's condition is all their own fault. After hubristically and unnecessarily calling an early election to try to take advantage of the crisis and chaos that they observed in the Labour Opposition, they have returned humbled, embarrassed, diminished, chaotic and in turmoil.

This is most definitely a House of minorities, and the way in which we conduct our business and scrutinise legislation must reflect that. Arrangements must be put in place to ensure that the new political arithmetic across the House is observed. That is why it has been profoundly disappointing that instead of rising properly to the challenge, the Government have done all they can to frustrate, delay and thwart the creation of all the arrangements that are essential for proper scrutiny in these new conditions. The Government's main strategy has been to try to make their legislative programme as opaque, meaningless and uncontentious as possible. They hope that we will get bored and take little interest in it, so that they will not lose any votes in Parliament.

The only thing that will be contentious—the one big deal of this parliamentary term—will be Brexit. Of course, the Government are unburdened in that regard, too. When it comes to the main themes of the Government's hard Brexit, the Labour Opposition agree with practically everything that the Government want to achieve, whether the leaving of the single market, the leaving of the customs

[Pete Wishart]

union or the ending of freedom of movement. The Government will therefore have no difficulty getting their Brexit business through, on top of a legislative programme that is so light it is almost totally opaque.

We also have to look at what was agreed in the early days of this Parliament. One of the most concerning and damaging of all the initiatives that the Government have embarked on is the appalling deal that they struck, right at the outset, with the Democratic Unionist party. That deal was agreed behind closed doors, and the House has not had the opportunity to debate it, scrutinise it properly or consider its consequences—not least how it turns the normal and usual funding allocations for the nations of the United Kingdom on their head. This is a deal designed to buy the Government their majority, and it has unfortunately set the tone for this Parliament and defined the Government's contemptuous approach to their business.

The other thing that has to go, very early on, is the appalling and divisive English votes for English laws procedure, which is opposed and loathed by every political party in this House apart from the governing Tories. It is clear that it no longer secures a parliamentary majority in this House, and it is ridiculous that in order to get their business through, the Government have to rely on a party that is subject to the constraints of EVEL. EVEL is disruptive to the House, and it divides the membership of this House by geography and nationality. Its days should surely be numbered. Let us get shot of it from our Standing Orders and see whether we can, through debate, secure a solution on which we can achieve consensus. Let us get something that reflects proper scrutiny and attention and serves all the nations of the United Kingdom.

We need to get down to business. It is simply unacceptable that the Select Committees will not be up and running before the recess. We have had a little exchange about where we are in the logjam of creating the Select Committees. I hope that the Leader of the House will take the matter seriously, so that we can get on and do it. We have to have the Standing Committees in place. Because we have no Standing Committees, Bills cannot receive proper consideration at Committee stage, so the Government have had to bring Bills before Committees of the whole House. Three Bills have been subject to that procedure. No Statutory Instrument Committees have been set up, and, as a result, we will be considering another statutory instrument after this debate. The situation is clearly unsatisfactory, and it is unacceptable for it to continue.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): We have all been through a process of election. If a prospective candidate does not get their name in in time, it is tough; the election goes on without them. It is not postponed until the end of the summer to give the candidates time to sort themselves out. Should we look at something similar in the makeup of Select Committees: if the governing party does not bother to put names down for Committees, the Committees just go ahead and meet without them, so that they can get on with the job?

Pete Wishart: That is an elegant solution to a very solvable problem, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for suggesting it. Perhaps the Government are listening. I hope that some action will be taken in the next few days to resolve the matter.

My understanding—the Leader of the House can correct me if I am wrong—is that we have not got the Standing Committees up and running because there is a dispute about the arithmetic. As I understand it, the Government have nine places, the Labour Opposition have seven places and we have two places. That would properly reflect the political arithmetic of this House, suggesting that it is a House of minorities, and it would mean that the Government had to work just that little bit harder in Committee to get their business through.

What would be clearly unacceptable—this seems to be happening, and I hope it stops soon—would be for the Government to subvert the Committee stage by either bringing legislation to a Committee of the whole House, here in the Chamber, or looking to make all their amendments on Report. That would fly in the face of nearly everything we understand about the normal business of getting legislation through Parliament.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting point. Everybody knows that the most inadequate part of the whole legislative process is Report stage, where the Government can put down amendments that are never even debated.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. She probably shares my concern about what would happen if that came to pass, and the inadequacy of Report stage. We would have everything baled into one, with Report, Third Reading and, probably, statements and other business on the same day. Intricate, important pieces of legislation require proper scrutiny in the proper Committees of this House, and it is incumbent on the Government to put that process in place. Any attempt to subvert the normal arrangements for Bills to go to Committee is clearly unacceptable, and I hope that the House will reject any such attempt.

We have heard quite a lot about how things are normally set up. I am almost disappointed that the hon. Member for—Chris Bryant, whatever his constituency is. [Interruption.] For Rhondda. I am almost disappointed that he is no longer here, because he is a keen student of the subject, and I think he actually gave us some figures. The Leader of the House said that we were in an unusual situation because we had had a June election. I was elected in 2001—I think you were elected before me, Mr Speaker—and I remember that in 2001 we had a June election, but all the Standing Committees and all the Select Committees were in place by the summer recess. The election in 2001 took place on 7 June, the Queen's Speech was held on 20 June and all the Select Committees were in place and functioning by 19 July.

Sir Desmond Swayne: The reason for that is that in those days it was a stitch-up by the Whips. Now we elect the members of Select Committees, and that is the key difference.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, because he reminds me of something that happened during the establishment of the Select Committees in 2001. He is right; it was a stitch-up by the Blair Whips, and he will remember when they tried to remove Gwyneth Dunwoody and Donald Anderson from the chairmanship of two Select Committees. That held up the creation of the Select Committees, but we still managed to get them

in place. There is absolutely no reason why the same cannot happen now. The example of the year of 2001 is a good one.

I very much agree with the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) when it comes to Opposition days and the setting aside of time for Back-Bench business. It looks as though Back-Bench business and private Members' Bills will be about the most interesting features of this parliamentary Session.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP) Hear, hear!

Pete Wishart: My hon. Friend has a particularly good private Member's Bill, and I encourage as many Members as possible to come along and listen to him speak about it. Back-Bench business and private Members' Bills will probably be our most interesting business, given the laxity that we are going to see from Government Members, and we must have the proper time and arrangements for such business.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Leader of the House spoke earlier about giving the House more time for private Members' Bills. Is that not an almost pointless exercise unless the Government reform how private Members' Bills go through the House, and unless they get their own Members to stop stymieing them?

Pete Wishart: My hon. Friend is spot on. I share his frustration, as I think most in the Scottish National party do, about the way in which private Members' Bills are progressed through the House. It is clearly unsatisfactory. I remember the private Member's Bill sponsored by my colleague John Nicolson, which was stymied by the Government even though we had the necessary numbers here. The way in which certain Members of this House—none of them are in their place at this point—do all they can to talk out and filibuster private Members' Bills is a disgrace to this House. Our constituents expect better than that. When their Members of Parliament are lucky enough, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) has been, to secure the opportunity to introduce a private Member's Bill, it is right and proper for them to expect those Bills to be properly debated in the House. I hope at some point we will be able to reform the process.

We support what the hon. Member for Walsall South said about the sittings for private Members' Bills. Of course the number should be doubled and I really hope the Government do that.

There has to be a proper arrangement and a proper understanding about the time allocated for Opposition days. The Labour shadow Leader of the House was absolutely right that we are entitled to three Opposition days per parliamentary Session and we now expect six, given that it is a two-year Session. I hope the Leader of the House will confirm that.

We have to get all these things worked out. The arrangements of the House are clearly unsatisfactory and there are lots of things we need to do. I spent a couple of weeks in the usual channels before my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) was put in place. I saw how the usual channels are working just now. There seems to be a misunderstanding

about how the different parties' requirements and expectations of this Parliament are to be met. I encourage the Leader of the House and the Whips Office to get a better grasp of the new reality of this House—this House of minorities, where nobody has a majority—and ensure that our business is equipped, shaped and designed to accommodate that new reality.

This zombie Parliament must get up and working. It must be allowed to do its work. It must allow the optimal conditions for scrutiny and empower us, as Members of Parliament, to do the work that our constituents sent us here to do. For goodness' sake, let's get on with it and let's do it.

6.41 pm

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I am disappointed that time will not allow me to contribute to the debate on the intimidation of general election candidates. Nevertheless, I will contribute fully when the opportunity arises, drawing on my own experiences. I thank the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who is from a neighbouring constituency.

It is a great privilege to be here today, delivering my maiden speech and representing my home constituency of Angus. I pay tribute to my predecessor, Mike Weir, who served the people of Angus very well in his 16 years in the House. He was a prominent campaigner to save the local post offices in the constituency, and in the House he took on the role of Chief Whip for his party. I wish him all the very best in his future endeavours.

It would be remiss of me not to mention also the previous Conservative and Unionist MP for Angus, the late Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, as he was known after being ennobled in 1989. He was not just a great local voice for his area in this House, but had a remarkable legal career.

The diverse constituency of Angus, nestled north of Dundee and south of Aberdeenshire, incorporates the most beautiful, dramatic coastlines to the east and picturesque, tranquil glens to the north-west. The five main towns are Forfar, Kirriemuir, Montrose, Arbroath and Brechin, where I was born, brought up and educated. There are a number of villages and rural communities as well.

Unfortunately, it is the residents and businesses of those remote areas who have suffered most significantly from the lack of mobile and broadband coverage. With the current coverage roll-out being below the national average, it is unsurprising that this issue has emerged at every single constituency surgery I have held to date. I will use my voice here in Westminster to ensure that the Scottish Government deliver connectivity right across Angus, ensuring that residents and businesses are not left behind because of where they choose to reside and operate.

From my agricultural roots, I understand the importance of this industry to Angus and to Scotland. With the area producing 25% of Scottish soft fruit and 30% of the country's potatoes, agriculture remains a significant contributor to the local economy. Local farmers understand the increasing importance of diversification and Angus is home to many successful projects, ranging from renewables to the first potato-based vodka, Ogilvy vodka, which is distilled locally near the village of Glamis.

[Kirstene Hair]

Glamis itself incorporates the famous residence of Glamis castle, the childhood home of the late Queen Mother. I recently attended the annual Glamis prom, one of the many excellent events that are held in the grounds of the castle, attracting thousands of people from across Scotland.

Attractions across Angus entice tourists from far and wide, whether it is to visit the many historic houses and gardens, to try their hand at golf on some of the best known courses, or to get involved in a variety of outdoor pursuits. Montrose port will welcome its first cruise ship, which is due to dock next year—a further great boost for our local economy and tourism industry. Nevertheless, I am incredibly aware that there is a power of work to be done to further promote the area, to support the current offering and to ensure that no one slips north into Aberdeenshire without tasting a Forfar bridie en route.

The businesses throughout Angus range from the local to the global. We have engineering and manufacturing, oil and gas, textiles and a highly regarded food and drink offering. A host of global businesses operate across every corner of Angus in key sectors, including pharmaceuticals giant GlaxoSmithKline; the Montrose textile manufacturer Wilkie in Kirriemuir; the marmalade, preserves and curds exporter Mackays in Arbroath; the textile innovator Don & Low in Forfar; and the design and engineering specialists Hydrus in Brechin. They are supported by a strong network of local businesses, which collectively are the lifeblood of our local economy, providing the jobs that Angus so desperately needs. As a Government, we must support them wherever possible, enabling both prosperity and longevity.

Angus has much to be proud of. However, like many places, it has concerns that my constituents have asked me to stand up and represent them on. The rate of unemployment, particularly among the youth, continues to lie above the national average due to several factors. The north-east oil and gas industry, which many residents in Angus rely on heavily, still has positivity, with new oil fields emerging, but the steady decline in recent years has had a large impact on the livelihoods of residents and on businesses throughout Angus. My north-east colleagues and I will work together with the industry wherever possible to support them.

As we face the challenge of Brexit, I am confident that the Scottish farming and fishing communities have the resilience to remain one of the key pillars of our economy. One of the greatest opportunities from Brexit is the chance to build a support system that works for Angus and for all areas of our United Kingdom.

The political landscape in Angus has demonstrated a clear shift in recent years. In the 2014 referendum on independence, we recorded an above average no vote. In the last three elections, there has been a considerable vote swing towards the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party. Those were strong messages to Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP that the time for constitutional trouble-making was over. Make no mistake, I and my Scottish Conservative, Scottish Labour and Scottish Liberal Democratic colleagues are as patriotic as my Scottish National party colleagues. We now need to ask them to remove the threat of uncertainty over Scotland's economy and Scotland's people. No ifs, no buts—a second divisive independence referendum should be taken off the table.

I remain optimistic for the future of Angus and the extensive Tay cities deal, which will directly support those who live and work in Angus. The planned £1.8 billion investment will include key programmes specifically for Angus, such as the Hospitalfield future plan; the Dundecom public-private partnership, which will create a major decommissioning centre in Scotland; and, of course, the ambitious investment corridor from Montrose to the A90 that will enable the delivery of much-needed infrastructure, stimulating major economic growth in north Angus. I look forward to working with the UK Government and all stakeholders to drive forward the Tay cities deal and ensure that it delivers for Angus.

As the Member of Parliament for Angus, my mission is to ensure that I am the strongest of local champions, representing my home turf with the greatest of integrity and never with complacency. As a staunch Unionist, I will continue to fight with every fibre of my being to keep Scotland as part of our wonderful United Kingdom. Quite simply, we are stronger together and weaker apart. I would also like to make it clear that I am here to help all my constituents, no matter how or, indeed, if they voted. I very much look forward to standing up for Angus and for Scotland in this Chamber on many more occasions to come.

Mr Speaker: Very warm congratulations to the hon. Lady. We look forward to hearing her and getting to know her in this House.

6.49 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): The hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) made what could be termed a model maiden speech. She was robust when necessary, she was fluent, humorous and generous to her predecessors, and she stood up for what she sees as the vital interests of her constituency. I am sure we all look forward to hearing further contributions from her. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) for securing this debate, because it is both timely and necessary.

During my time in the House, the role of Members of Parliament has been seen as either to support or to oppose the Government of the day. People do not always slavishly follow the Whip in the House, and rightly so on occasions. Occasionally, issues of conscience have to be decided—for example, on end-of-life decisions or stem cell research—and it is right and proper that free votes should be held on those. On other occasions—for example, on our relationship with the European Union—people's views are perhaps too distinctive to be easily bracketed within the confines of party loyalty.

As we know, the outcome of the last general election changed the political arithmetic of this House. Until such time as we have a further general election, the potential power held by each of us, including the hon. Member for Angus, is greater than it has been in the many years that I have sat in this House. I have two questions on that point. Are we willing to use that power—in my case to bring about greater fairness and address injustices, some of which I will refer to shortly—and can we look not at what we have been in the past as a House, but at what we could become?

I will be brief, Mr Speaker, because I know you want us to stick to the issue at hand more closely, but I want to say a word about party allegiance and how it works

in the context of the House. I have spent all my adult life in the Labour party, and I remain in it because I share its values on equality and social justice. That is not to say, however, that we as a party have a monopoly on virtue. I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House share those values, at least to some degree. I have one further point of a political nature: because the Government have no majority, the usual argument about having a mandate for measures contained in the manifesto is weak to the point of irrelevance.

I also want to say a word about the right hon. and hon. Members from the Democratic Unionist party. Since entering into a supply and confidence arrangement with the Conservative party, they have, perhaps in some ways understandably, been heavily criticised in some quarters. However, that agreement does not cover every measure that the Government may bring forward. Knowing some of the DUP Members as I do, I am confident that on some issues we can achieve co-operation with them and, certainly on some of the issues that I feel strongly about, I think they will share a similar outlook. It is therefore not a given that on every occasion the Government can rely on their support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South, the shadow Leader of the House, has already referred to the injustice of the women born in the 1950s and the age at which they are entitled to their state pension. Many of us, on both sides of the House—including, I suspect, Democratic Unionists—support the WASPI campaign. If we as a House are firm enough in our resolve on that subject, we could bring about a fair solution.

I also hope we can all agree that the growing inequality in our country is unfair and corrosive. Wherever we look, whether at access to housing, the life chances of young people or insecurity of employment, we see the stark reality of those consequences—reliance on food banks, growing homelessness and unacceptable regional disparities in income and support for public services. That also means that we need to take a more generous approach to public sector pay.

If the House can adapt to the new realities of our power and influence, we can try to resolve those problems. However, in order to realise that power and influence, we first need to take more control of our own procedures and achieve much greater agency in the legislative process. In my view, that means empowering Select Committees to produce White Papers and draft Bills, and giving the Procedure Committee and the Backbench Business Committee control over the programming and timing of private Members' Bills. It would also mean that the Government were held accountable for some motions that were carried by the House with cross-party support. In other words, they should be bound by some decisions of this House in some circumstances.

Finally, I am sure that the Government will object to such changes in the way that we function on the grounds that the House does not take responsibility for the financial consequences of its decisions. However, the Government will have to put that argument on each occasion and Members of this House will have to assume responsibility for the decisions they take. In the recent past, the reputation and standing of politicians in western democracies, not least our own, have fallen alarmingly, the consequences of which we see in the rejection of long-standing political certainties. However, the arithmetic of this Parliament presents us with an

opportunity to take our reputations, both collectively and individually, into our own hands. Do we have the confidence to realise what we could become? Surely we have a duty to at least try.

6.57 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a great pleasure to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), who delivered a superb maiden speech. It is a great pleasure to see her in her place today, and I look forward to hearing further such contributions from her in the months and years to come. It really was a fantastic start to her parliamentary career.

I fear that today's debate has been something of a missed opportunity. No institution, let alone Parliament, should be set in aspic. We need a strong parliamentary institution, and if that is what it is, it should evolve. It should have adult conversations about the way it conducts itself. There are strong arguments for change in the way the parliamentary business is scheduled, but I am afraid that the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) did not make them, and nor indeed did the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart).

That is a great shame, because debate on improvements in this place, including improvements to scheduling, is what our constituents would expect us to cover, despite what some hon. Members were implying earlier. That should be what we discuss, and the focus should be on what would make us more productive and what would reduce the costs of Parliament, which are still considerable and not to be ignored. Perhaps the Opposition should have focused this opportunity on areas where real change is needed—change that has already been recommended by publications such as “The Good Parliament” report and in the work of the all-party group on women in Parliament.

I want to focus briefly on three of those changes, which I hope those on the Opposition Front Bench and, indeed, the Leader of the House will consider in a little more detail.

First, I should like a Division hour to be introduced. That would give all of us parliamentarians an awful lot more certainty about how we can plan our days. At present, we suffer from the archaic system of voting at the end of debates, and Members are very uncertain about when the votes may come, particularly during the Report stages of Bills. Division hours, which are common in the European and Scottish Parliaments, might give us the extra productivity that we now expect regularly from our constituents when they are going about their everyday work.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The right hon. Lady makes an excellent suggestion. Does she agree that we should also get rid of the antiquated system of walking through the Lobbies to vote, and follow other modern European Parliaments such as the Scottish Parliament by introducing a press-button system for Members who are present?

Mrs Miller: We shall have to agree to disagree, because I think that going through the Division Lobby is one way in which Members of Parliament can talk to each other. It can be cohesive. We can talk to Ministers about the policies that they are developing, for instance. I do

[Mrs Miller]

not support the idea of electronic or remote voting; I think that the present system creates more of a team within Parliament.

I do not support the idea that a vote at the end of every day, sometimes in the wee small hours of the morning, gives anyone the edge. It gives no one the edge. It feels as if we were re-enacting the D-day landings, and trying to adopt guerrilla tactics, which, in my 12 years of being in Parliament, have never worked. They have never changed the outcome of a debate, or the outcome of a vote. I urge the Government to think about how they can modernise that aspect of our parliamentary schedule—which brings me to my next point.

I am reliably told by some Members who have been here much longer than I have that late sittings are an integral part of parliamentary life. I know that they are not as late as they have been in past generations, but we are still regularly here until 10 pm, as we will be tonight. We may not mind that, which is absolutely fine, but there are consequences. The late votes that we decided to have cost the taxpayer £5 million over the last five years, and those were staff costs alone: the additional costs of policing and security must at least double the amount. At what point will we, as a Parliament, realise that sitting until 10 pm, or voting at 10 pm, on a Monday is not an integral part of the work that we do? When will we realise that we could change that, and save taxpayers money? We could also improve the quality of life of the staff who work here, which we currently seem to disregard when we make decisions about the scheduling of our sitting hours.

Kevin Brennan: This matter has been considered many times over the years, but does the right hon. Lady accept that one of the issues about Mondays is the need for Members to travel here from far corners of the kingdom, many of which are much further away from London than her constituency?

Mrs Miller: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I am very fortunate not to have the long commute that he may have from his constituency. Ultimately, however, what I am saying is that while we could decide to continue to have debates into the evening, voting earlier in the day would mean that, from the point of view of parliamentary staff who must currently be on standby throughout the evening—and who, of course, receive compensation as a result—we would be at least one step further towards modernising the shape of this place.

Kevin Brennan: I am not sure that I heard the right hon. Lady correctly. Was she suggesting that we should have the votes before the debates had finished?

Mrs Miller: No. The hon. Gentleman's party might do that, but we would never suggest it in ours. The hon. Gentleman is obviously familiar with the concept of the deferred division, and he will, I am sure, have looked at what happens in Europe and Scotland.

I was rather disappointed that the hon. Member for Walsall South did not talk about the importance of changing parliamentary scheduling to protect the work of Select Committees. There has been a great deal of

debate about the importance of constituting Select Committees, but, having chaired a Select Committee for the last two years—and I am very pleased to have been re-elected to that position—I can say that much of our work can come to naught as a result of the scheduling of parliamentary business in the House. Indeed, my Select Committee's trip in connection with the United Nations convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was scrapped as a result of a vote here, because we do not have something as simple as a proxy system for Members of Parliament.

Rather than talking simply about Opposition day debates, will Opposition Members please talk about other important aspects of scheduling? It is not “job done” when it comes to the way in which our Parliament operates, but today's debate has risked obscuring that. I think it a shame that some Members have failed to focus on the real issues of the scheduling of parliamentary business. I hope that Labour Front Benchers will support some of the important changes that I have suggested, so that we can give the House a more modern face, and perhaps by doing so attract a wider cross-section of Members of Parliament in the future.

7.5 pm

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech during this debate. It is an important debate, which goes straight to the heart of the kind of Parliament that we are going to be. Will it be a Parliament that stifles debate and scrutiny, or will it be a Parliament that is accountable to its Opposition and openly democratic? I know which Parliament my constituents would like.

When I was first selected as the candidate for Battersea, 11 weeks ago, many believed that I would not or could not win. That is why it fills me with great pleasure that the people of Battersea chose me to be their Member of Parliament. It is a huge honour for me, and I will serve my constituents to the best of my ability. My family played a vital role in supporting me during the campaign, and I will be forever grateful to them for the sacrifices that they made to help me to be elected.

Before I go on, let me pay tribute to my predecessor, Jane Ellison, for the work that she did in trying to halt the practice of female genital mutilation. I do not share Jane's politics, but when it comes to this truly important cause, she leaves a proud legacy. We are both lucky women to have been given the privilege of representing Battersea, a vibrant and exciting part of south London with a long and proud history. Battersea is growing, and it has so much to offer. Our iconic Battersea power station, that symbol of municipal pride, is reawakening along the river. Our transport hub, Clapham Junction, has more trains passing through it than any other station in Europe. Our fantastic green spaces are well loved and used by many, from the kids in Battersea Park to the sunbathers of Clapham Common. But, of course, it is the people of Battersea themselves who make it such a wonderful place, and it is to them that I owe most thanks.

No one should be surprised that we in Battersea, one of the youngest, most diverse and most well-educated constituencies in the country, take our politics so seriously. Battersea, like much of London, is changing rapidly, and I want to ensure that those changes benefit everyone.

In this last election, there was an increase not only in the number of young voters, but in the number of people turning out to vote for the first time, and with good reason. We are increasingly divided, not least on housing. Private rents have soared. Housing is insecure. Glistening new developments are rising up around us, but the cost of housing puts them way beyond reach. It is a scandal that people under 35 have simply been frozen out of home ownership. Too many people are confronted with housing pressures that are getting worse.

It does not have to be this way. Here in Battersea, we have some of the oldest council housing. The Shaftesbury Estate, built in the 1870s, sought to produce decent homes for working people. That spirit needs to be reignited, and we need to become pioneers again. As the Labour MP for Battersea, I know that I am standing on the shoulders of giants: politicians who were radical and way ahead of their time. It was in Battersea—Labour—in 1906 that the first working-class MP became a Government Minister, in the form of the ferocious John Burns. In 1913, we gave rise to London's first black mayor, John Archer, whose father came from Barbados and whose mother was an Irishwoman.

In 1922 Battersea became the first constituency to elect an Asian Labour Member of Parliament, the Indian radical Shapurji Saklatvala. Of course, we also had the heroic Charlotte Despard, the Anglo-Irish suffragette who dedicated her life to championing the rights of the poorest in Battersea, and whose statue can be found in the central square of Doddington estate. In 1933, at the age of 89, her last public activity was to address the crowds at a big anti-fascist rally in Trafalgar Square. Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope that I have as much fire in me when I am that age.

I would also like to pay tribute to my more recent Labour predecessors: the wonderful Lord Alf Dubs, whose fight on behalf of Syrian refugees has been an inspiration to us all; and Martin Linton, who has continued to champion the rights of the Palestinian people since leaving office.

As you can see, Mr Deputy Speaker, in Battersea we are outward-looking and internationalist. It is that outward-looking spirit that I will endeavour to bring to Parliament. With the decision to leave the European Union, we face serious challenges ahead of us. It was a decision that my constituents care deeply about and voted overwhelmingly against. I will be standing up for them, drawing on that outward-looking Battersea tradition, one that values openness, tolerance, social justice and co-operation.

As you are aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, I was born with nystagmus, an involuntary movement of the eye, which has left me with a severe sight impairment. Living with my visual impairment, I have had to overcome many barriers, but I want to give a special thanks to my mum, who is here today. She made sure that I had a brilliant education—a brilliant state education. When I was at primary school, the headteacher thought that it would be better if I was sent to a special school, but my mother was having none of that and fought tooth and nail to keep me in mainstream education. I can safely say that I would not be the woman I am today, or an elected Member of Parliament, had it not been for her. Mum, I am truly grateful.

I have been a disability rights campaigner for most of my life. I believe that people living with a disability, like myself, should have the right to participate in society equally. They should have the right to a good education, the right to travel and access public transport, and the right to work. An important issue that is dear to my heart is the employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Still today less than half of working-age disabled people are in employment, compared with 80% of the non-disabled population. That is just not good enough. We need to change that. Over the past seven years, policies on social security and social care have disproportionately affected disabled people. When we discuss all these matters in this House, it is important that we understand and empathise with the real people who will be affected by our decisions.

I am proud to be here in this Chamber, and I am proud to be representing the people of Battersea.

7.13 pm

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) on her maiden speech and welcome her to her place. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) on her excellent maiden speech, for its wit and wisdom and its focus on connectivity to her constituency.

Democracy is a system for processing conflicts, and in this House that lies at the very heart of our debates; it is truly what we have come to this place, the mother of all Parliaments, to do. It is absolutely right that parties of all colours should be able properly to hold the Government of the day to account. Since arriving in this place in 2015, I have certainly found that the opportunities to do so have been plentiful.

It has to be said that the calling of this debate by Her Majesty's official Opposition has very little to do with representing their constituents; to my mind, it has everything to do with political point-scoring. This is truly a case of navel-gazing by the Opposition, using precious parliamentary time to do so. It is a debate about debates, which is exactly what my constituents and theirs will feel angry and aggrieved about.

The reality is that the Standing Orders state that there should be 20 Opposition days in any one Session, 17 of which are for the main Opposition party, which in this case is the Labour party—I see the Opposition Benches emptying. The Labour party was provided with those 17 days in the previous Session, which lasted less than year. It has been offered the usual Opposition day debates for the short September sittings through the usual channels.

However, I agree with the Scottish National party's Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), that voters simply do not want to see this type of debate; they want to hear us discussing what matters, which is jobs, opportunities, schools, the impact of Brexit nationwide and so much more. Interestingly, the hon. Gentleman also mentioned his frustrations with filibustering. The greatest shame tonight is that we will be unable to discuss properly the shocking incidence of nationwide abuse of candidates during the general election, which is something I raised with the Leader of the House—I received a positive reception—in applications for Back-Bench business debates. It is up to the wit and will of Members of this House to use all

[Mims Davies]

the tools at their disposal to ensure that the points and issues raised by their constituents are heard via co-operation, and indeed their own persistence.

As right hon. and hon. Members will be aware, there have already been plentiful opportunities for Opposition Members to make representations in the Chamber on behalf of their constituents during the debates on the Queen's Speech, because the Labour party of course had six days to choose those topics. Therefore, I join right hon. and hon. Friends in their disappointment that these complaints are being made to the Government. Indeed, I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) that this was purely a great opportunity for the Opposition to look at process, rather than complaints.

Kevin Brennan: I am enjoying the remarks of the hon. Lady, who debates very openly and freely. Does she not also agree with her hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), who pointed out that, given that the Government have announced a two-year Session, anybody can see that it is only fair play to consider giving Her Majesty's loyal Opposition some extra Opposition days so that we can do our constitutional job of holding the Government to account?

Mims Davies: I think that there are two points to be made in response to that intervention. First, it is up to the wit and wisdom of Members to use all the tools at their disposal, and I absolutely agree that the Opposition will play every trick in the book, and why would they not? Secondly, I have found myself in a multiplicity of debates since the election, so I wonder how Opposition Members can feel so aggrieved. I have been in debates about new towns, WASPI—Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign—Grenfell Tower, travel infrastructure, school funding and so much more since my return to this House. I am sorry that Opposition Members have not found the variety of opportunities that my colleagues and I have found.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): My hon. Friend makes an important point about attendance by some Labour Members. Perhaps she saw the coverage of last Tuesday's Westminster Hall debate on managing the public finances, which was attended by a great many Conservative Members and almost no Labour Members.

Mims Davies: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Far from weakening our democracy, the Conservatives in this Government have strengthened it by giving our constituents more voices and by turning up at the debates that have been held.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Lady referred to the WASPI issue. What we want is a votable motion so that she can prove that she is with us and with the WASPI women. How will she vote when there is a votable motion?

Mims Davies: As a former chair of the all-party parliamentary group for women in Parliament, I certainly have a lot of sympathy when it comes to the WASPI women, but Government finances are difficult, as we have heard. I would certainly like us to find a way to help those most affected, and I have made those points in every single debate in which that has been possible.

We have given our constituents a chance to have a voice. One area in which we have done so is through e-petitions. I know that has happened, because I have found the voice of my constituents in my inbox, and I thank them for that. The 10 years of its operation has provided the chance for Parliament to reach into people's homes and lives, with 10 million people signing petitions and no fewer than 20 petitions being scheduled for debate. E-petitions have engaged us in various subjects in this debating Chamber, and I have been delighted about that, particularly, thinking back to my time on the Women and Equalities Committee, those on transgender issues. This Parliament is more diverse and outward-reaching than people will ever know, but the problem with debates such as this one is that we will look more enclosed.

The Government have looked to ensure that the most talented MPs from across the House get a chance to feed into in-depth policy discussions and I congratulate all the Members who have been elected to be Select Committee Chairs. By contrast, we know that during Labour's period in office the time for Prime Minister's questions was reduced and there were complaints of sofa-style government. In fact, the complaint was always that the media was told first and the Chamber second; we do not see that from this Government.

I will conclude as I know we are pressed for time. Her Majesty's Opposition have tried today to make out that there is one rule for us and another rule for everybody else. However, all of us in this Chamber are defenders of democracy, and we can see that if we use all the tools and instruments, we will have a voice for our community. So I think that Opposition Members would do well to listen to us on strengthening democracy. They should take a very serious look at taking a leaf out of our book when it comes to hearing from our constituents and reflecting what matters to them.

7.21 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): First, I want to pay tribute to the two Members who have made their maiden speeches this evening. I agree with the strong comments of the new hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) about the need to keep the UK together. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) made a moving speech, telling us how she and her mother shared a determination to make sure that she had access to mainstream education. That is a tribute to the strength of a mother's love and also to the disability rights movement and the need to make sure that people with disabilities enjoy full access to mainstream society, education, employment and so forth. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend.

This debate is not just about technicalities; it is about the national interest, and it would behove all Members of this House to remember that on 8 June this country decided it did not want to give any one party a majority position and the strength to form a majority Government. It gave Parliament the power to shape Government policy potentially, and to hold the Government to account.

It is clear that the electorate expect this Parliament to act in the national interest and not to behave in any way that is deeply tribal or which puts the party interests before the interests of the country. In that respect, I found the Leader of the House's speech deeply disappointing. She was deeply tribal in her comments

and, indeed, was losing the House to the extent that two points of order had to be made to get her back on track. It is detrimental to the interests of this House when we have a debate about parliamentary democracy itself and it descends into a tribal slanging match between the Front Benches on different aspects of Government or Opposition policy. That is not what this debate is about. This debate is also not a parliamentary game; it is about democracy and the ability of Parliament to hold the Government to account.

I want to make a quick comment about the general debate on abuse of candidates in the general election, which was to have been held tonight. I made a short contribution to the debate in Westminster Hall last week. I do believe that all it takes for evil to prosper is for good people to do nothing, and I am ready to have a debate in the main Chamber on abuse generally in society and abuse of politicians within political parties and outside them and between them. However, would it not be a good idea if Conservative Members were to join with some of us on the Opposition Benches and develop a proper application to the Backbench Business Committee so that we can have that debate in the Chamber, based on support from both sides of the House for such a debate?

The technicalities of the current debate are clear: it is about the number of Opposition day debates, Backbench Business debates and private Member's Bill days, which has barely been mentioned tonight. It is also about the timeliness of the first Opposition day debates. I have looked at the House of Commons Library research on this and it is clear that our Opposition Front Bench has a strong case. The records are clear. In the first Session of the 1997-98 Government, which lasted 18 months, there were 38 Opposition day debates, and the delay before the first Opposition day debate after a general election in the last seven or eight years has been 22 days, 22 days and 14 days. On that basis, we should have had that Opposition day debate by now.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg: I am following what the hon. Lady is saying closely. However strong the case the Opposition have made, does the hon. Lady think it is wise to ask for an emergency debate on a debate rather than on a specific and urgent topic?

Angela Smith: That point has already been made this evening, but the point is that we are not getting the space necessary for us to raise those important topics.

Kevin Brennan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) to question the Speaker's ruling that tonight's debate is taking place on an urgent specific topic under Standing Order No. 24?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I do not think we need to worry about that.

Angela Smith: Fortunately, the intervention of the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) feeds directly into my next comment. Opposition days, Backbench Business Committee days and private Member's Bill days on sitting Fridays are all very important and are the key means in this House of raising issues of concern to our voters. That precisely answers the hon. Gentleman's point.

Opposition days and private Member's Bill days give us a chance to effect real change to Government policy, yet we have had only 13 days allocated. The Backbench Business Committee is, and will be, crucial in this period of minority Government to developing the cross-party, cross-Bench relationships and the arguments necessary if we are to be effective as a Parliament in effecting real change to Government policy.

Mr Kevan Jones: This point has not really been raised in this debate, but is not the real reason why the Government are doing this the fact that there can be votes on those debates? The Government are scared of a number of individuals on their Back Benches doing what my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) said, which is voting in the national interest rather than their party's interest.

Angela Smith: I completely agree with my hon. Friend and that was exactly the point I wanted to make.

The Prime Minister said only two weeks ago that she wanted cross-party working and a national consensus between the parties in order to serve the national interest. The Government have made a very poor start on that. If they want consensus, I am more than happy to play my part, but they need to show that they mean business and are ready to use the mechanisms of the House and to make it possible for a consensus to develop in real and meaningful terms in this Chamber. We have seen very little evidence of that so far.

I shall finish on a rather more controversial point. I believe that the real reason we are seeing so little action from the Government in providing for meaningful Opposition day debates or for legislation—there is still no Committee of Selection, and Bills are coming to the Floor of the House when they should not be doing so—is that the Government are absolutely desperate to avoid any kind of Back-Bench instability in the Commons. That is because they are so worried about the future of their own Prime Minister. The truth is that Government Front Benchers want to get beyond the conference season and beyond October to be sure that they still have this Prime Minister in No. 10. They are absolutely desperate to avoid any meaningful debate in this House, in order to shore up the Government's position. That is an appalling abuse of parliamentary democracy, and it is not in the national interest. When is this zombie Parliament going to end?

7.30 pm

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), and I may refer to one of her comments later. As she knows, I very much respect her, having worked with her in the Council of Europe. I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) on her maiden speech. Well done to her! I would also very much like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), who made an absolutely wonderful speech. It is so lovely to see another young lady—a Scottish one—in the House of Commons today, so well done and thanks for your contribution.

I find it quite surprising that I am speaking in this debate. I was not going to do so, but I read the request that came through and I found that I could not stop

[Kelly Tolhurst]

myself. I felt that I really had to contribute. I am disappointed that the debate will mean that, sadly, we will not have time for the debate that was to follow. I am quite sad about that. I am very surprised that the Opposition have called this debate today—

Mr Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kelly Tolhurst: No, I want to make some progress.

I am surprised that the Opposition are complaining about the amount of time they have had to debate issues that are important to them. Since the election, we have had six days of debate on the Queen's Speech, which many Opposition Members took part in. They had an opportunity to have their say in those debates. We have also had numerous urgent questions involving current issues and matters that are relevant to our constituents. I cannot speak about what happened before 2015, because that is when I was elected, but I have looked back over the past two years. There have been a number of debates on Government business and on important pieces of legislation which have not taken the full allocation of time because there was little appetite from the Opposition to join in. One occasion in particular takes me back.

The Children and Social Work Bill was one of the biggest pieces of legislation on children and social work for a number of years. Interestingly, it did not use up all its debating time on Second Reading, on Report or on Third Reading. However, interestingly, when we were debating an amendment on unaccompanied minors that had been tabled to grab the headlines, the Opposition Benches were packed. As soon as the amendment had passed, the Chamber emptied again. In fact, only one Opposition Member spoke on that Bill, which covered issues such as advisers for care leavers and adoption. Did the Opposition feel that those key issues in that massive piece of legislation would not quite grab the headlines? I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) that tonight's debate seems to be about political point scoring and the Opposition trying to grab headlines when they think it will matter.

We have two years ahead of us in which, as the Government make progress, to debate the biggest piece of legislation that this Parliament has seen for many years. It covers something that my constituents are extremely concerned about. They are concerned that we should debate the issues properly and that we get the right legislation through the House, so it is absolutely correct that that must be the focus on both sides of the House. We must have enough time to debate that issue—

Chris Bryant: What is it?

Kelly Tolhurst: It is the issue of Brexit: the laws that will come through and the intricacies of what will happen when we leave the European Union.

Really, I think the Opposition should get over themselves a bit. As many of my hon. Friends have pointed out, 20 Opposition day debates have been put aside, which will give Labour 17 to take part in. I look forward to joining in those debates when they occur—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), who

is sitting at the back there, has spent the whole debate being quite rude, not only to the Leader of the House but to me. What a shame—

Mr Kevan Jones: May I give the hon. Lady some advice? If she is going to make a speech, will she please look at the subject before she stands up to speak? She said she was disappointed that this debate was limiting the time available for the next one, a point made by the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies). If she had not given in to the Whips and agreed to speak in this debate, would we not have had more time for the next one?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention—

Mr Rees-Mogg: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kelly Tolhurst: I will.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thought my hon. Friend might like to remind the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) about an hour-long speech he once gave in an attempt to filibuster a Finance Bill debate. Motes and beams come to mind.

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, but I would like to go back to the hon. Member for North Durham's point. I am fully aware of what this debate is about. That is exactly why I wanted to highlight the poor performance of the Opposition in the debates on the Children and Social Work Bill. We had three debates on a subject that I and many of my constituents—including the young, looked-after children—care about, and it was really depressing when I had to go back to those children and say, "I'm very sorry, but the Labour party, which says it represents you, was not speaking up for you in the Chamber. It was the Conservatives who did that." So I will make that point!

Anyway, Mr Deputy Speaker, I shall carry on. I am looking forward to the next two years here, in which we will do what the British people want. They want us to make sure that we deliver on Brexit. I suggest that Labour Members get over themselves and recognise that they have many opportunities to debate and to contribute in the House. They should just get on with it, and work with us to deliver what the British people want.

7.38 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), who made an absolutely sterling, brilliant Union speech. I concurred with nearly everything she said in it, apart from the political stuff—[*Interruption.*] Well, the party political stuff. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova)—who is not in her place at the moment—also made an exemplary speech. It is nice to hear a Member paying tribute to their mother in the Chamber, and my hon. Friend did that beautifully and elegantly.

It is a shame that I am following the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), because I am actually rather fond of her, having spent a great deal of time in her constituency contributing to the Labour party coming third in the by-election. She said that Labour Members needed to get over themselves and get

on with it. Yes, we would like to get on with the business of opposition; the problem is that we are not being given the Opposition days on which to be the honourable Opposition. That is the whole point. I apologise to the Leader of the House; I was rude to her earlier. I actually like her, and there are some things that I want out of her, so I am going to be nice to her now. Seriously, I was rude earlier, but I feel strongly about such issues.

The Government and Government Members need to bear it in mind that the power of the Executive in our parliamentary system is quite phenomenal. Standing Order No. 14 says that the Government have complete control over the timetable. They get to decide when they are going to give days to the Opposition, to private Members' Bills and to the rest, but Government business always takes precedence. Standing Order No. 48 says that only the Government can table motions relating to money and taxation. We do not have a proper Budget; we have a Budget speech. This House does not actually decide on the process of how money is allocated at all. Standing Order No. 83A means that only the Government can table a programme motion, so only the Government can decide how much time we are going to devote to each element. Even in the utter nitty-gritty of the Welsh Grand Committee, only the Government can table a motion under Standing Order No. 108 to say when we are going to have a Welsh Grand Committee, what it will debate and all the rest of it.

Kevin Brennan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is also speaking through a hole in his head. It is just a biological fact, and I hope he does not think I am being rude.

My hon. Friend is describing a fundamental principle of this place, and that is actually what this debate is about—it is not a debate about debates. The principle is that the Government have their way, but the Opposition have their say. By denying us Opposition days while having their way about extending the Session to two years, the Government are breaching that fundamental principle of Parliament.

Chris Bryant: Yes, we have had several Sessions that lasted only several months because of early general elections or because, in the old days, the parliamentary Session started in November and then ended in the spring. We did not suddenly have 17 Opposition days because that is the fixed number of such days in a Session. Since Richard Crossman introduced these in November 1967, the whole idea of the change from Supply day debates to Opposition day debates was that the Opposition would have a fair amount of guaranteed time during the year.

This is not just about the Standing Orders; the Government have the absolute power to decide on the date of the Prorogation and how long a Session will be. That is only in the hands of the Government, not in our hands or the House's hands. The Government get to decide when we will adjourn and go into recess. Only Government amendments are guaranteed to be considered on Report, and only the Government can table an amendment to the Standing Orders and be certain that it will be debated. That is a phenomenal tying up of power in the hands of the Executive, and the only thing that the Opposition have in return is the expectation that the Leader of the House and the Government will exercise fair play.

Pete Wishart: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for totally forgetting his constituency during my contribution. How could I forget that he is the hon. Member for Rhondda? May I suggest a solution that he may like to think about and put to the Leader of the House? If there is going to be an issue with Opposition days, one way around this is through unallotted days, which were used in 2015 to 2017. I am sure that he will remember that they were also used in 2001. What is the reason for not giving unallotted days? The Government could just say how many of them they were going to give.

Chris Bryant: They could do that. In the 2010 to 2012 Session, the problem was that we did not know that it was going to be a two-year Session until the Session moved along. The Government kept on refusing to announce whether there would be a Prorogation or a two-year Session, so it is not an exact match with what we have now. The Government have already said that this will be a two-year Session, so they should be able to say that there will be a proportionate number of Opposition days and days for private Members' Bills and Back-bench business. Any ordinary member of the public would say that that is what everybody would genuinely expect.

The hon. Members for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) and for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) said that all this stuff does not really matter and that it is not about democracy. I would ask them just to remember that the big row in this House in 1939 was about whether the House should adjourn in August when there was a fear of war with Germany. That was the row. It was not about some grand piece of legislation; it was about whether the House should adjourn. Ronald Cartland—the younger brother of Barbara Cartland—who was killed while serving bravely in the second world war and who has a shield on the wall of the Chamber, accused Chamberlain of having “ideas of dictatorship” because Chamberlain was using the undoubted power that Government had to decide when the Adjournment was and he thought that that was wrong, especially in a House that was largely composed of Conservative Members.

Another problem is that the recent move towards lots and lots of secondary legislation might be okay if what the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has regularly said in the House were true—namely, that if a piece of secondary legislation is prayed against, it will always come to the House—but it is not. Between 2010 and 2016, 69 pieces of secondary legislation—statutory instruments—tabled by the Government were prayed against by the Opposition. According to the “David Davis” rule, it should have been guaranteed that they would be debated on the Floor of the House, but how many of the 69 were debated in the House? Three. Eight were debated in Committee, but the debates in Committee were not about whether they were good statutory instruments; they were on whether the matter had been considered. Even if every single member of the Statutory Instrument Committee had voted no, the measure would still have gone on the statute book.

When the Government come forward with something called the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, which wants to give massive amounts of secondary legislative power to the Government, the Opposition are very sceptical. That is when it starts to look like, in the words of Ronald Cartland, “ideas of dictatorship”, not because any of the individual members of the Government think

[Chris Bryant]

of themselves as dictators, but because the power that this House has, over the years, given to Government over every element of the agenda is so important.

Several people have already made the point that we should have had an Opposition day by now. I say to the hon. Member for Eastleigh that there is a vital difference between a hot-air debate that ends with a vote on whether we are going to adjourn, as we had at the end of the WASPI debate, and a substantive motion on the Order Paper that has effect, either because it is legislation or because it is an Opposition day debate. When Labour were in government and had a majority, we lost an Opposition day debate on the Gurkhas and that changed what happened—several of us here have scars from that debate. In the end, the Government cannot always run away from those kind of debates. I say to Conservative Members that there has to come a point when the whole House has to consider the long-term future of how we do our business, not just the partisan advantage of today.

Mims Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: If the hon. Lady does not mind, I will not because I want to—

Mims Davies: You are talking about me.

Kevin Brennan: She has a very good point.

Chris Bryant: As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) says, the hon. Lady has a very good point, so I will give way.

Mims Davies: The hon. Gentleman is very kind. As a former shadow Leader of the House—I enjoyed his speeches when he was sitting where the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) is—will his constituents in Rhondda really think that the time that this House is spending debating parliamentary business is what we should be doing in the last week before the recess? I said in my speech that jobs, opportunities and schools are what really matter.

Chris Bryant: Of course, there are lots and lots of things that we should debate. I would like a debate in Government or Opposition time—I do not mind—with a votable motion on the WASPI campaign. I know exactly how I am going to vote, and I hope that I will be able to persuade the hon. Lady to join us in the Lobby. We can have as many warm-words debates as we want, but if there is no vote at the end, our constituents will feel fundamentally let down. I say to Conservative Members that they would be better off having that debate sooner rather than later; otherwise, they will have an awful lot of upset people.

If the Government had a programme, I would be happy for us to debate that programme, but there is no legislation. The Leader of the House referred to the Air Travel Organisers' Licensing Bill, but that is not a Bill—it is barely a clause in a Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) said earlier, we had to debate it on the Floor of the House because the Government have not set up the Committee of Selection so that we can have a proper Committee to debate the thing.

I do not doubt that the Government have the power to do these things, but I no longer think they have the authority to do them. Every day they abuse that power, they diminish their own authority; and every day they stretch the gap between their power and their authority, they abandon government by consent and lapse into ideas of dictatorship. That is why the Government are wrong.

7.49 pm

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): In some ways I feel that Christmas has come early, because here we are with three hours to debate parliamentary procedure, one of my favourite activities. Indeed, I look forward to aestivating in Somerset and talking with my family about all the intricacies of Standing Orders, so I feel in many ways fortunate.

It has been a particularly happy and fortunate debate, with two brilliant maiden speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), whose constituency I have had the privilege of visiting—I know its manifold beauties—put the case for the Union perfectly. She should be hired by her tourist board to encourage further visits to her wonderful constituency.

The hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) was so generous to her predecessor. It is one of the great charms of maiden speeches that we recognise in them, if only briefly and for the only time in our political careers, that people on the other side of the House are actually not all bad. It is very charming that that is done, and she did it particularly well.

Standing Order No. 14(2) is an important subject, and I have much sympathy with what the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said in his well-considered speech. It is the job of those of us on the Back Benches to hold the Government to account, but the job of holding the Executive to account is not just one for the Opposition; it is one for Government Back Benchers, too. Our constitution works if it is balanced and if the Government have to make their case and their arguments, but this debate misfires because the Opposition have come to it too soon in the Parliament and have given it an urgency that it does not deserve.

In my earlier intervention I questioned whether it was wise to have asked for this debate, not whether it was wise to grant the debate. Standing Order No. 24 is an exceptionally valuable tool, and I am glad you are back in the Chair, Mr Speaker, because the more that Standing Order is used, the better.

Kevin Brennan: That is not what the hon. Gentleman said earlier, as *Hansard* will show. Standing Order No. 24, as he well knows, puts the onus completely in the hands of the Speaker to decide whether something is an urgent matter for debate, and the motion does not proceed if the Speaker does not believe it is urgent.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I questioned the wisdom of requesting the debate, not of granting it, which is a very important distinction. It is of the greatest importance that the Speaker, if asked for an emergency debate by the formal Opposition, should in almost all circumstances grant it because such debates are an important way of holding the Government to account and of inconveniencing the Government.

As the hon. Member for Rhondda said, Standing Order No. 14 gives enormous power to the Government to set out the business of this House, but the Opposition need opportunities to raise urgent matters. There, the Opposition must be wise in what they ask for.

Kevin Brennan: Given the hon. Gentleman has put on the record that he believes the Speaker should, in almost all circumstances, grant a Standing Order No. 24 request from the Opposition, I look forward to his supporting future applications that the Opposition will have to make because of the lack of time for Opposition day debates.

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is where I think the Opposition have misfired today:

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

But this is not the season or the time. So much is happening of general urgency, and this debate strikes me as fiddling while Brussels burns. We have the massive Brexit debate to consider, we still have a huge deficit to be debated and we have a great housing crisis that has been so starkly brought to our attention by what happened at Grenfell Tower, and what do Her Majesty’s loyal Opposition ask for? They ask for a debate on Standing Orders—a debate on a debate. A debate on conversation. Even for one who loves procedure and thinks it of great importance, can that be what is of most urgency to us today? It is a question of proportionality.

The hon. Member for Rhondda made many important points about how the House has limited powers to hold a strong Government to account and about how it should use those powers, but the Opposition have asked for this debate a few days into the Session, before we have had any real opportunity to discover how many Opposition days we will have, and well before it is decided whether additional days will be given because it is a two-year Session. I have no doubt that further days will be given. Indeed, if all 20 days have been used up a year from now and the Government come to the Dispatch Box to say that there will be no more days, I will be on the side of the Opposition. I would support the Opposition in asking for a proportional share during the second year of this Session, which would be only right. I would also be in favour of an extra three days for the Scottish National party, because that is what this Parliament ought to do, but the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), the shadow Leader of the House, has misfired—this is too soon and too early, and it is not genuinely urgent.

Pete Wishart: I sort of accept the hon. Gentleman’s point. Maybe it is a bit too early, but he knows the history of previous Parliaments and of how Opposition days were granted after the Select Committees and Standing Committees were up and running. It is unusual for those Committees not to be up and running after four weeks. Surely he must have some concerns about that.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Again, I think the hon. Gentleman is premature. The issue is the month lost between May and June. We have the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, and we have gotten used to having elections in May. We therefore expect these things to be up and running in time for the summer recess, which I absolutely accept, but he misses the point that the election was under not

the normal procedure but the extraordinary procedure of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act. We therefore assembled a month later, closer to the summer recess. The process of electing Select Committee Chairmen and Select Committee members takes a little time, and the Opposition are simply being unreasonable. If we were having this debate in September, they would have a fair point; and if we were having it in October, they would have an outrageous point if they did not have any Opposition day debates by then.

This Session has hardly begun. It is in its infancy. It is like Sixtus, my newborn son. It is still in the mewling and puking stage. It has not reached the stage of toddling, walking and taking bold steps.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that, when raising a child, one must try to instruct that child in good behaviour from the very beginning and not let it misbehave early on? Therefore, surely our role is to ensure that the Government do not misbehave early on.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is a harsher authoritarian than I am. The strict disciplining of a child not yet a fortnight old would be unreasonable by any standards. All I can say is that I am glad not to be an infant in his household.

This debate is too early, and the problem with it being too early is that it comes when things of real gravity are happening. We are in as uncertain a time as I can recall. There is so much of gravity with which we need to grapple. I have said that I think and hope that you would grant any reasonable request by the Opposition for a Standing Order No. 24 debate, Mr Speaker, and there are so many debates for which they could have asked. In her opening speech, the hon. Member for Walsall South listed about a dozen things that could have been debated. If any of them had been requested under Standing Order No. 24, we could have had a sensible debate that added distinction and lustre to this Parliament. But standing here—I am as guilty of it as anyone else, but I have admitted that I am a procedural bore—and discussing the intricacies of procedure when so much is going on is not in tune with the nation and is not serious opposition; it is opportunism. If they can, the Opposition should withdraw the motion.

7.59 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I am delighted to be able to speak in this important debate. I thank you for granting it, Mr Speaker, and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) for securing it. I wish to follow everyone else in congratulating the new Members, the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) and my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova), on making superb, notable maiden speeches.

I want to confine my remarks to the procedural debate and the arguments we are putting forward, which I believe are solid and sound. Let me start by pointing out that the result of the general election has changed the role of this Chamber; power has shifted from the Executive to Parliament. There have been few times when we, as Back-Bench MPs, have had a greater ability to influence and shape Government policy. It is all very well Members suggesting that this is a needless debate, but I do not think that is true; people can stretch the

[Grahame Morris]

truth thin enough, but when they do that others can see through it. It is true that a lack of time has been allocated to Back-Bench business, private Members' Bills and Opposition day debates, and people can see that that is an attempt to stifle the role and influence of this Chamber. I sincerely hope that Back Benchers, of all parties, can also see that.

At the Prime Minister's recent relaunch, she reached out to the Labour party, asking us to "contribute and not just criticise".

That is a worthy sentiment. Although I may disagree fundamentally with the right wing of the Conservative party, the Prime Minister's plea to Labour was an attempt to stifle the Back-Bench voice in this Chamber. I am willing to work with parliamentary colleagues, but I would never vote to cut workers' rights or to privatise even more of our public sector services. I accept that I will be unable to convert many in the Conservative party—perhaps not any—to the benefits of re-nationalising our railways, abolishing university tuition fees, or increasing spending on social care or on other public services, although there are many sound arguments for doing such. However, there are areas of consensus, and issues that can bridge politics.

I had hoped the public sector pay cap would be such an issue. I had hoped that some Conservative Members would be outraged by the Chancellor's alleged comments, which were widely reported, about public sector workers—the idea that nurses, teachers, firefighters, police officers and prison staff were "overpaid" and receiving a "premium". I would like him to tell that to the student nurse who contacted me over the weekend as she faced the prospect of sleeping in a colleague's car, because there were no trains after her night shift and she only had £10 to last the week. I hope eventually we will see the lifting of the pay cap. If it does not come from Conservative Members, perhaps their colleagues in the Democratic Unionist party can exert their influence and give public sector workers the pay rise they deserve.

I will look beyond the Prime Minister's offer to "contribute", as there is little prospect of her ever listening to a lowly Back Bencher, particularly a socialist, trade union supporting Labour MP like me. So perhaps there is more prospect of reaching out to other Back Benchers, not just to criticise, but to contribute. Other right hon. and hon. Members have made reference to the Westminster Hall debate on 5 July about the women's state pension age and the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign. It was extraordinarily well attended—the Chamber was packed. It was dominated by Opposition Members from the Labour party, the Scottish National party and other nationalists, but a sizeable number of Conservative Members were there, too. There were excellent contributions by Members from every party, who recognised that a clear injustice had occurred and that the Government should take steps to put things right. The Government's response ranged from indifference to ridiculousness.

I ask Conservative Members to look at the comments from the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), who was here just a few minutes ago. He is not a bad individual and I get on with him incredibly well, but it is outrageous to suggest that women who have been forced

to wait longer for their state pension should be offered apprenticeships. For the Members who were not there, I can tell them that I have never heard anything like what I heard from the public gallery; there were gasps and cries of "Shame!" when the Minister made that outrageous suggestion. He did a disservice to the women affected, the Conservative party and the Government.

Although I do not have a great deal of interest in the reputation and popularity of the Conservative party, I expect many Members sitting opposite do. I certainly know that, privately anyway, many may disagree with the Government's position on the WASPI women and strongly believe action should be taken to right this wrong. As Back Benchers, we have not only a voice in this Parliament, but the ability to shape policy and, in this case, improve the lives of millions of our constituents. I know we do not want to have a re-hash of the debate, but I am trying to deal with the point that the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) made about how we could be addressing important issues, as this is a crucial issue.

With all due respect to the Leader of the House and the Government, who determine the business, in this Session we seem to get involved in a lot of displacement activity; we are debating the same things over and over again, without a vote on the motion. If we do not have a resolution, we simply cannot move forward. We need to demand of the Government—this needs to come not only from the Opposition, but from Back Benchers—that they do something. I can assure Members that if we have consensus, or we are dealing with sensible policies or sensible Bills from Members from any party, I will give such matters my full consideration, and I hope others would do the same.

I ask Conservative Members to recognise that they have the power to demand change for the WASPI women. If the Government will not budge, we will have to demand and obtain a meaningful vote on the Floor of the House. I know the extent of the changes we can achieve will be determined by those willing to break the Conservative Whip, but Back-Bench MPs had only a small voice in the last Parliament. Now the arithmetic has changed and, in this Parliament, we have the power if we choose to exercise it. WASPI is one campaign where I know we have the numbers, and other hon. Members may be able to identify other issues or concerns; I have a whole bagful in relation to the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, the Homes and Communities Agency and so on. If we have a basis for consensus, we can achieve policy changes. If, as I suspect, we have a legislature that does not wish to legislate, I urge and implore all Members to make this Parliament the Back-Bench Parliament.

8.8 pm

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I love process and procedure, and I do not think it is to be derided or criticised. Process and procedure is why we settle big debates in this place and not out there on the streets, so there are no apologies from me.

I am delighted that we have such experts in this place on process and procedure. I know very little about it, but my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) is an expert, as are you, Mr Speaker, in the Chair today. I do not want to sound like a crashing

bore in what is my maiden speech in my fourth Parliament—four Parliaments is quite impressive; we are moving in the right direction. But I would just say that the genuine maiden speech—

Mr Rees-Mogg: “Erskine May” makes it clear that someone’s maiden speech is their maiden speech only in their first Parliament, so they are allowed to be interrupted in subsequent Parliaments.

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend makes that point brilliantly in the way that only he can.

My hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) made a fantastic speech, a Unionist speech, and touched on a part of the world I love greatly, Scotland. It is a beautiful country and my hon. Friend will be a fantastic representative for her constituency.

Although she is not in her place, the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) made a fabulous speech about a part of the world I hold very dear. I was, after all, a councillor in Battersea, in the borough of Wandsworth, for many years—well, actually, for four years, but it seemed longer. I was a councillor for the most famous and celebrated ward of Battersea, Balham. If you are going to be a councillor anywhere in the country, why not Balham?

In concluding my brief remarks, let me say that it is always best for Governments of whatever colour to be generous and magnanimous. As you will know, Mr Speaker, in this place generosity is often abused but never despised. My plea to Government as we go forward is for them please to be generous in their approach to the Opposition Benches. They will be on the side of the angels if they are.

8.11 pm

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) and my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) for their maiden speeches. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend, who, as I was, was one of the unexpected winners that brought my party some steps closer to being the party of government.

With the greatest of respect to right hon. and hon. colleagues, I have sometimes been a bit disappointed by my experiences as a new Member of Parliament. The first disappointment I commented on was the lack of answers to questions and our inability to hear either during Prime Minister’s questions. Indeed, a tweet I made on the subject was viewed more than half a million times and retweeted 10,000 times by the public, who no doubt share that concern. The fact that I have to take part in this debate today as a new Member without the ability to do anything substantive as an Opposition Member until, allegedly, October, is adding to my disappointment.

I, like many others, have looked towards politics since childhood as the route to achieving change in this country. I, like many other Members, have worked hard for years, election after election, to be elected to this House to try to achieve that change. Like in the children’s novel, “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz”, I always assumed that if I made it to the end of the yellow brick road to this place I might find the wonderful wizard of government. Instead, much like Dorothy and her obviously disappointed dog, Toto, I have failed to find a Government of mandates,

leadership or stature and instead, behind the curtain, I have found a group of middle-aged men protecting their egos in a bid to take over from a lame duck Prime Minister.

Andrea Leadsom: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I challenge the hon. Gentleman on whether he just called me a middle-aged man?

Mr Speaker: I hope he did not; that would be a serious error. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not accusing the Leader of the House of being a middle-aged man, and if he could confirm that, honour will be served.

Darren Jones: Of course I would not class the Leader of the House in that group of middle-aged men—but I am sure that she knows each and every one of them as they vie for the leadership of her party and, perhaps, try to take her position.

When Britain faces arguably her most challenging time since the second world war, with decisions taken here in this Parliament deciding what type of country Britain will be for the next generation, it seems to me that the Government need to step up to allow for accountability and opposition. As my hon. colleagues have said, this debate is about the lack of time being given to us, with Opposition day and Back-Bench business debates seemingly in short supply on the basis of simple parliamentary mathematics.

Many Government Members who campaigned to take back control and argued for parliamentary sovereignty for this place will no doubt share my concern. A. V. Dicey, the father of parliamentary constitutional theory, would be turning in his grave; the theories on which he built from Montesquieu on the separation of powers and the trias politica, which mean that power should be balanced between the Executive and the legislature, are not being followed because the Opposition are not being allowed to hold the Government to account. The balance is not as it should be. The taking back of control to this Parliament, as opposed to the Executive, is failing. With a Government entirely consumed by their chaotic management of Brexit, seemingly more interested in self-preservation than the national interest, it must be left to the Opposition to act as a party of government with a mandate for government in our manifesto to ensure proper debate on the issues about which my constituents are concerned.

Dare I say that it is no longer acceptable for Ministers to stand up and say, “Everything will be fine; we are a great nation”? Blind patriotism detached from the real world will only show us as a country out of touch and out of control. That is why we must be allowed proper time for debate in this House, to help the Government understand the reality of their inaction. My frustration at the news yesterday was a prime example, as Ministers decided to waste their time by briefing against each other instead of getting on with the job in hand. That frustration might have been calmed by the knowledge that I would have the opportunity to debate the issues of the day in a grown-up, professional and respectful fashion in this House, in the way my constituents expect of us and for the reasons they elected me to this House in the first place. But it seems that that most normal of asks is being thwarted by the Government, so it is with

[Darren Jones]

great disappointment that I find myself having to make this speech in support of the motion from my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), arguing for what should be normal debate in this Parliament.

Although you might not be able to resolve my disappointment, Mr Speaker, at what I found behind the curtain of power, I hope that this House will put the national interest above power games and party political concerns and allow proper time for debate and scrutiny.

8.17 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones). I, like other hon. Members, am a bit disappointed that the debate has eaten into time that we might otherwise have used for the debate on abuse and intimidation of candidates and the public during the general election campaign, particularly as at the weekend, when I was trying to enjoy some quiet time with my family, a member of the public went to the considerable extent of getting my private number to phone me up and tell me that she disliked me and what I stood for so much that she was not surprised I got death threats. That was a charming start to the weekend with my family. But this is also an important debate, and it is important that we consider the scheduling—or rather, the lack of scheduling—of parliamentary business before the recess.

We have heard two excellent maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) made an accomplished speech and I thank her for the gracious comments she made about our friend and colleague, Mike Weir, our previous Chief Whip. I respect her Unionist views and I hope that she will respect my wishes for my country to become independent in due course. She is very keen for the SNP to take independence off the table according to what she says were the wishes of her constituents in 2014, but I remind her that last year her constituents voted by a significant majority to remain part of the European Union. She might also like to ask the Government to take Brexit off the table if she is so keen on her constituents' wishes.

We also had a fantastic maiden speech from the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova). She is not in her place, but I found it a fascinating history of her admirably diverse constituency and a very moving tribute to her mother in assisting her in the battle with her disability. I am sure that she will be a fantastic advocate in this House for those of our constituents who have to deal with disability in their lives.

As hon. Members have said, there can be no doubt that this Government seem to be running scared of scrutiny. The very reason we had an unnecessary general election four or five weeks ago was that the Prime Minister wanted to avoid scrutiny by getting herself such an enormous majority that this House would not scrutinise her effectively, but she did not get her wishes, and now we have a hung Parliament in which there is the possibility of true scrutiny. But she need not despair; she need only look north to Holyrood for an example of a minority Government who have managed to bring forward a full legislative programme in their first year that includes groundbreaking legislation on child poverty, and the Social Security (Scotland) Bill, which will put fairness,

dignity and respect at the heart of Scotland's social security system; that is not what happens in the system under which the rest of the UK labours.

It seems that the Prime Minister is running rather short of ideas. Those of us in Scotland who fought Tory candidates in the general election, as I did—successfully, I am glad to say—will be aware that the Tories in Scotland had only one policy. People are beginning to wonder what the Tory party stands for. What is it here to do? What do the Government exist to do, other than take Britain out of the European Union in the most inane and hapless fashion possible?

What will the new Scottish Conservative Members of Parliament do in this Parliament to scrutinise the Government? What will they do with their time here? Clearly the Prime Minister's estimation of their abilities is such that she has had to enoble one of their colleagues who was defeated by my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and shove him into the House of Lords to be a Minister, because she does not think that the Tory MPs are up to it. I wonder if she is right, as they have shown a remarkable ignorance, since they got here, of the difference between devolved and reserved powers—rather like the drafters of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, it seems. I would like to make a generous offer: I would be happy to recommend an undergraduate law student from my alma mater to give the Conservatives a little tutorial on the difference between reserved and devolved powers, so that they can cope with this Parliament.

Pete Wishart: As the Scottish Conservatives are 13 in number, it is quite possible that they could inflict a Government defeat, if they chose to. They said that they would work for Scotland's interests; does my hon. and learned Friend remember exactly what they did in response to the appalling deal between the Government and the Democratic Unionist party that was put forward?

Joanna Cherry: I do, and as somebody who is LGBT, I find the deal with the DUP particularly obnoxious, but it is not just my rights that I am bothered about; it is everyone's human rights, including women's reproductive rights and human rights generally. [Interruption.] An hon. Gentleman shouts at me to give over, but human rights are important to some of us in this House. I am happy to tell him that I will not give over on human rights.

My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire asked what the Conservative Tory MPs would do to represent the interests of voters in Scotland. We are promised an immigration Bill sometime this Parliament. There is no sign of it yet. One thing that Conservative MPs could do is respect the wishes of business in Scotland. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Institute of Directors have said—

Pete Wishart: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it right and appropriate that while my hon. and learned Friend makes a speech, Tory heavies stand at the Bar of the House and heckle and chunter away, though they are not part of this debate?

Mr Speaker: I had not heard the alleged chuntering. Hon. Members certainly should not chunter; it is unseemly behaviour. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) is a robust individual and

is well able to fend for herself, but they should not stand in an aggressive, Mafioso posture. It is rather disagreeable and quite unnecessary.

Joanna Cherry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope this is a point of order rather than a point of advertisement.

Mark Pritchard: Not to correct the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), but may I confess that it was not the Whips chuntering? It was my good self, Sir.

Mr Speaker: That is both candid of the hon. Gentleman and, arguably, a first.

Joanna Cherry: My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire, some hon. Gentlemen and, of course, the Speaker, are gallant, but I can assure them that I have no difficulty with the chuntering going on to my left. It certainly will not put me off my stride.

I was suggesting that the Government need to bring forward a debate on the Floor of the House on the basis for their immigration policy. We heard during the general election campaign that the Prime Minister wants to stick with the unrealistic targets that she has missed for seven years. The reason why the targets are unrealistic is that they are based on ideology, not evidence. We need an evidence-based debate on the Floor of the House about immigration policy for the whole of the UK. If we have that, we will see that immigrants are on average more likely to be in work, better educated and younger than the indigenous population, and that Scotland's demographic needs are such that we require a progressive immigration policy. As I said earlier, business in Scotland wants this; the Chambers of Commerce and the Institute of Directors in Scotland have said that they want the post-student work visa bought back, and a different immigration policy for Scotland, given its unique democratic needs. Let us have a debate about that, rather than about process.

Countries such as Canada and Australia manage to operate differential immigration procedures within their federation. Professor Christina Boswell of the University of Edinburgh has produced an excellent report evaluating the options for a differentiated approach to immigration policy in Scotland. There is cross-party support in Scotland for the post-study work visa; even the Scottish Tory party supports its return, so what will the Tory MPs do about that, and when will we have a debate about it on the Floor of the House?

Another important issue from the last Parliament is the plight of child refugees in Europe. Many of us, including Conservative Members, fought for their rights, and we got the Dubs amendment to the Immigration Act 2016. Last week, I attended the launch of a report by the Human Trafficking Foundation that followed an independent inquiry on separated and unaccompanied minors in Europe. It reveals that the UK Government have woefully failed those children, and that Ministers have done

“as little as legally possible”

to help unaccompanied children in Europe. It says that the Government have turned from a humanitarian crisis that “would not be tolerable” to the British public if they could see the truth of what was happening in France. When will we be able to hold the Government to account for the promises that they made when the Dubs amendment was agreed to, and for bringing only 480 minors to the United Kingdom when the understanding was that they would bring in 3,000? When will we have a debate about that important issue? We must find time in this Parliament to force the Government to rectify their dereliction of the duty that we imposed on them when we agreed the Dubs amendment.

Finally, on the connected issue of human rights, hon. Members have mentioned the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill that was brought forward last week. Clause 5 makes it clear that the Government do not intend the EU charter of fundamental rights to become part of what they call domestic law after Brexit. This must be challenged and debated immediately. There was a time not so long ago when the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union was a great fan of the charter. He liked it so much that he used it to take up a legal challenge against the “snooper’s charter”, which ended up in the European Court of Justice, but he has changed his mind, and he has brought forward a draft Bill under which a whole swathe of rights and protections enjoyed by our constituents will go, if the Bill is passed unamended. Where is the debate about that?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The charter of fundamental rights only applies to citizens of the United Kingdom insofar as it applies to EU law. It therefore cannot have applicability once we have left the European Union because we will no longer be subject to EU law.

Joanna Cherry: Yes. But if, as the Government have promised, the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill is going to guarantee all the rights that we already enjoy by virtue of our EU citizenship, the charter of fundamental rights should not be going. The charter defends all sorts of rights, such as data protection, children’s rights and the freestanding right to equality, which are not protected by the European convention on human rights.

Lucy Frazer: Would those rights not be protected when incorporated into our laws as British laws, notwithstanding that their source was the EU?

Joanna Cherry: The hon. and learned Lady is ably illustrating why we need a debate about this. Despite the fact that the EU charter of fundamental rights will not be part of domestic law, she thinks that those rights will, nevertheless, still be protected. Let us have a debate about how we are going to do that. That is my point. On the face of the Bill, it looks like these rights will be lost.

These rights are real. Just last week in the Supreme Court, a gentleman called John Walker was able to ensure equal pension rights for his husband thanks to EU law. That was a timely reminder of the value of EU law to our constituents. Those are important rights. What is more important than a married couple of two men or two women having the same pension rights as a straight couple? I personally find that very important, as I am sure do many other Members.

[Joanna Cherry]

We cannot afford to fall behind the standard set by the European Union on human rights. But, on the face of it, the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill seems to be about to do that. We must insist on parliamentary time to debate these issues properly. I call on the Government to get their act together, have the courage of their convictions and bring the business to the Floor of the House. We can then debate some of the issues that I, and other hon. Members, have mentioned in a full and frank fashion. The Government should do that, rather than running scared from the policies that they were so keen to espouse when they thought they were going to have a whopping majority. They are not so keen now.

8.31 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the maiden speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) and the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair).

If we get time today, we may get to a debate on the Youth Parliament. I am probably one of the only Members of the Youth Parliament when it was set up in 2000 and 2001 who has now become a Member of Parliament. I reflect on that experience compared to this one. The kind of behaviour we now see from the Government—cutting down the opportunity for debate and discussion—would have been unheard of in the Youth Parliament. This is meant to be the mother of Parliaments, but it seems perfectly acceptable to play jiggery-pokery with the timetable. I wonder about the responsibility of the Government, and what this looks like for constituents out in the wider world.

Today my constituents were queuing around the block for more than an hour, not for a gig or a music activity, but to see the local doctor in Peacehaven. That is a regular thing for my constituents. Why? Because, of course, doctors' workloads have doubled, and the resources to our NHS have reduced. Equally, we do not have enough houses. Independent research shows that teachers' pay has reduced by £3 an hour in real terms and that their workloads have increased since the Conservative party took power. [Interruption.] Members on the other side of the Chamber may wish to chunter about that, but I suggest they read the research.

My constituents would be flabbergasted to think that we are effectively reducing our workload by covering the same amount in two years as we would in one. I am afraid that saying, "Oh, it is all because that is what it says in the Standing Orders" is a weak response. We need to take the moral high ground, not just the letter of the Standing Orders.

Mark Pritchard: May I suggest that the facts contradict the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks? Today we are having a debate about future debates, and that is democracy, whether he likes it or not. However, does he agree that we need a strong economy to pay for a strong NHS? Is the British model or the Venezuelan model the best way to pay for a strong NHS?

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: We can take from the best all around the world—from Scandinavia, Germany and so on. Germany, for example, has a strong economy and a

fairer society, unlike under this Government, where we have a bigger divide between rich and poor, and where people have not been able to access vital services.

Last week, a woman came into my surgery and said she had been on the waiting list for a council house for two years. I had to tell her that she was likely to remain on that waiting list for another three or four years, because the reality is that not enough houses have been built under this Government, under previous Governments and for a generation. Surely, we need to talk about making sure we can hold the Government to account for their policies. My constituent asked me to make sure her voice is heard in this Chamber. If I go back to her and say, "I'm terribly sorry, but we didn't quite get enough Opposition days to raise your urgent needs," she will feel as if her voice, through me, has been taken away—and she will feel like that quite rightly, because it has been taken away. A lack of debate and Opposition time takes the voice away from constituents from all constituencies across this country.

This has happened not with a vote in Parliament but just with an announcement in the papers that we will now have a two-year period rather than a one-year period. [Interruption.] Session. I do not think constituents will really care what you wish to call it. They will care about the fact that the Government are denying them a voice in Parliament, not about the petty name politics that some Members wish to play.

I am a relatively new Member—I have been here only a few weeks—but if I were an employee and I suddenly said, "I'm not going to do my work in a year. I'm going to take two years to do it," I would be put on capability, and I would probably not have a job. Well, I suggest that this Government are put on capability and that they should not have a job, because extending the amount of time in which to do the same amount of work in is not on in the workplace, and it should not be on in our Parliament.

What the Government could do is very simple: they could come here and pledge to do three things. They could say the same number of days per year will be offered for Opposition and Back-Bench business as there are in the Standing Orders per Session—easy-peasy. They should say that, make a pledge and make a commitment. Then we will not need to shoot our guns early; we will be able to sit down and relax.

The second thing the Government could easily do is say that there will be the same number of days in this Parliament for all these things as there were in previous Parliaments. That would be nice and easy to do. They could make that statement now, and, again, we could relax.

Finally, the Conservative party could get on with selecting its Select Committee representatives. They could get on with allowing us to scrutinise legislation. They could get on with the work. It is easy. The Labour party has managed to hold an election today. Our election shut 10 minutes ago. We will be announcing our representatives. Conservative Members could have been busy doing the same. Why have they not done that? They have been fiddling while democracy burns. Get on with it! That is what members of the public want: they want you to get on with it. That is what Opposition Members want: they want you to get on with it. The Government should agree the times, agree the days, make a statement, allow us to debate the issues that matter, and stop wasting our time by their prevarications.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the scheduling of parliamentary business by the Leader of the House and the implications of a two-year session for Standing Orders requirements.

ADJOURNMENT (NOVEMBER AND CHRISTMAS)

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

That this House—

(1) at its rising on Tuesday 7 November 2017, do adjourn until Monday 13 November; and

(2) at its rising on Thursday 21 December 2017, do adjourn until Monday 8 January 2018.—(*Andrea Leadsom.*)

Question agreed to.

Business of the House (Private Members' Bills)

8.41 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): I beg to move,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 20 October, 3 November, 1 December 2017, 19 January, 2 and 23 February, 16 March, 27 April, 11 May, 15 June, 6 July, 26 October and 23 November 2018.

The purpose of this motion is to provide 13 days for private Members' business, in line with what is required under Standing Order No. 14. Given that we have already announced that this will be an extended Session, we will of course expect to provide additional days in due course. In the extended parliamentary Session of 2010-12, the Government provided extra days for private Members' Bills, and these were approved at a later date. The motion we are dealing with today covers days for private Members' Bills between now and 23 November 2018. We will therefore bring forward a motion to provide additional days for private Members' Bills in due course, which will allow us to take into account the progress of business and any new recess dates that are announced in future.

This House must balance the needs of Members to proceed with private Members' business with Members' other priorities. Members value time spent in their constituencies on Fridays, and scheduling additional sitting Fridays for private Members' Bills in 2019, with no regard to what pressures might exist at that time, could cause avoidable inconvenience. This motion is a proportionate way to deal with this being a longer Session, and I encourage the House to support it.

Mr Speaker: I should notify the House that I have selected both of the amendments on the Order Paper—the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant).

8.43 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I beg to move amendment (a), after 'That', insert

' , subject to the House agreeing before Thursday 13 September 2017 to a Motion providing for an additional 13 sitting Fridays for Private Members' Bills together with the necessary adjustments to Standing Order No.14,'

I thank the Leader of the House for moving her motion. I should like to speak to the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I will not go over some of the arguments that I have made previously, but clearly, to our constituents private Members' Bills are a very important part of parliamentary business. Given what has been said previously, we do not have any confidence that the Government are actually going to provide us with the extra dates that the Leader of the House mentioned. That is why we tabled our amendment to provide for an extra 13 sitting Fridays.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I am sorry to cut the hon. Lady off so early in her speech, but if she wants 13 extra days will she clarify whether she is also campaigning for another ballot to be held in a year's time? If private Members' Bills from the existing ballot were given

[Philip Davies]

26 days, that would double their chances of success compared with an ordinary Session. That strikes me as unfair. Her proposal would work only if there was another ballot in a year's time.

Valerie Vaz: I really would like that ballot, and at the top of the list would be a request that the hon. Gentleman did not disrupt private Members' Bills.

Private Members' Bills are an important means for Back Benchers to bring issues before Parliament. Many outside organisations and charities also wish such Bills to be debated. I am deeply concerned that it has been very difficult for members of the public to submit petitions, partly because Select Committees, especially the Petitions Committee, have not yet been organised. As I have said previously, we have already picked our Select Committee members, but the Leader of the House has said that the Committees will not be sitting or even organised until September.

That is why it is important, for the confidence of Parliament and for democracy, in the interests of all our constituents, that time be allocated to private Members' Bills in line with Standing Order No. 14. The Government's press release states that the Session is double the length of a normal parliamentary Session, so we would expect and accept an extra 13 days.

8.46 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I had not intended to speak in this debate, but given that the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) failed to answer my very simple question, it seems that we need to explore this subject a bit more deeply. Her amendment merely asks for another 13 sitting Fridays, while that tabled by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) goes a bit further and names an additional 13 Fridays. Neither of them, however, addresses the issue of whether they want an extra ballot in a year's time.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Surely the important point is that, of the 14 Bills that made it on to the statute book in the previous two parliamentary Sessions, three came from ten-minute rule Bills. There are other routes to getting private Members' Bills on the statute book.

Philip Davies: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her comment, but the problem with ten-minute rule Bills is that they go to the back of the queue. The Bills that get precedence are those that come out of the ballot—they are the ones that get the best slice.

Of course, I understand why the hon. Member for Rhondda has tabled his amendment. Obviously, if I were in his shoes I would make the same argument: he wants 26 days rather than 13 because his Bill is top of the list and that would enhance his chances of getting it through. He is arguing out of natural self-interest and I do not blame him for doing so. If I had come top of the ballot—

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab) *rose*—

Philip Davies: The hon. Gentleman can tell us that he is not arguing out of self-interest.

Chris Bryant: I am arguing out of the hon. Gentleman's interest actually, because he supports my private Member's Bill.

Philip Davies: It is an ugly rumour but it also happens to be true: I do support the hon. Gentleman's private Member's Bill. It seems to me, therefore, that he does not need 26 days to get it through. This, however, might be his tactic in reserve, in case things do not go so well on the first day and he needs more days. I hope he will declare his interest when he moves his amendment.

The hon. Member for Walsall South has not given an explanation for her amendment. The House's Standing Orders are clear that there shall be 13 days for private Members' Bills in a Session—not a minimum or a maximum of 13 days, but 13 days. That is it. That is what is in the Standing Orders. If people want to meddle with those Standing Orders, they have to meddle with the whole thing. It is not acceptable to say, "We will have one ballot in this Session of Parliament, and we will have 26 days for that ballot." That does not wash.

The hon. Members for Walsall South and for Rhondda could have come along with an amendment to the effect that over this two-year period we need to have a second ballot in a year's time, with 13 extra days for that ballot. That would be a perfectly respectable position to hold, and I would have a bit more sympathy with that argument, although I am not saying that I would support it. The argument that they are making—that we should have 26 days for one private Members' Bill ballot—is completely and utterly unreasonable.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying about the Standing Orders, but the Leader of the House just announced that the Government may come forward with additional sitting days for private Members' Bills throughout the Session. Would he oppose those, and for what purpose would he suggest they should be used?

Philip Davies: I think the Standing Orders are perfectly adequate. There should be 13 days for private Members' Bills in a Session; that seems to me a perfectly reasonable number. I do not really see any justification for saying, in effect, that those who enter this ballot of private Members' Bills in this Session deserve a better chance of getting their Bills through than they would have done in any previous Session of Parliament.

Angela Smith: The hon. Gentleman is being generous in giving way. If I recall correctly, there was a motion in the 2010-12 Parliament to extend the number of private Members' Bill days on the basis of the Session being extra long. I cannot recall him calling for an extra ballot when that motion was passed.

Philip Davies: Just because something happened in the past, it does not mean that it was a good thing. The example that the hon. Lady has given falls into that category. If she looks at my voting record, she will notice that an awful lot of things that happened during the coalition years were not particularly to my taste. I used to vote accordingly, as the record will confirm. Praying in aid something that happened during the coalition years is not necessarily the best way to win my support.

My point is that this is a matter of fairness. Everybody enters a ballot in each Session of Parliament knowing that there will be 13 days in that Session when private

Members' Bills can proceed. We are being asked today to agree that in this particular ballot from this particular Session, MPs will have a better chance of getting their private Members' Bill through than they would have done in any previous Session.

Mr Jones: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but surely if this was a normal, year-long Session, the chances of getting a private Member's Bill through would be less even than with the 13 days. I have some sympathy with him about the idea of having another ballot, but does he really think it is fair that the number of days should be limited when the Session has been increased to more than a year?

Philip Davies: As I have said, I think there is an argument for saying that there should be 13 days for this ballot, and that in a year's time we should hold another ballot for which there would be another 13 days. That would give people 26 days within the Session. That would be a perfectly reasonable thing to request, and I would have a great deal of sympathy with that. But nobody in the Opposition appears to be making that case. Why can we not have another ballot in a year's time if we are going to have double the number of days? The hon. Member for Walsall South has not been able to answer that question. No doubt the hon. Member for Rhondda will have a crack at answering it, but I do not think that there is much of an answer.

The hon. Lady seemed to be making the point that we should be trying to replicate what would normally happen over the course of two years. What would normally happen over the course of two years is that we would have two ballots, so why has the hon. Lady not included in her amendment the extra ballot that would normally have occurred during that time? She seems to be cherry-picking the bits that she wants.

I say to the Deputy Leader of the House that he should beware such requests for supposed fairness, when they would actually introduce a very unfair system in this Session of Parliament. He should stick to his guns and say that for each private Member's Bill ballot, there should be 13 days. That is plenty of opportunity for people to try to get their legislation through. If people want another 13 days, there must be another ballot—something that nobody, as yet, seems to have called for.

8.55 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I wish I could say it was a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies). I am very fond of him, as he knows. He is a regular visitor at Perth races and we enjoy that. I say to him, in all candour, that he is everything that is wrong with the private Members' Bill system as it is currently constituted. His filibustering—his attempt to destroy honest attempts by Members of Parliament to bring legislation forward—is the thing that our constituents hate most about sitting Fridays. I wish at some point that he would just stop.

Philip Davies: What the hon. Gentleman ought to reflect on is that the first Bill that appears on a Friday needs just 100 people to turn up to support it. He is guilty, like many other hon. Members, of complaining that a Bill did not get passed when he could not be bothered to turn up and support it. If he bothered to turn up, some of the Bills he claims are so important would get through. Perhaps he should tell that to his constituents.

Pete Wishart: Yes, of course it is a matter of 100 Members turning up, but we have had 100 Members here and private Members' Bills have been thwarted not by the hon. Gentleman, to be fair to him, but by the Government. There is something wrong and rotten in the way we deal with private Members' Bills in this House. We waste our time coming down from Scotland to participate in these debates, only for him to drone on, sometimes for two hours, to ensure that they do not proceed.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Procedure Committee has produced dozens of reports over the years—at least two in the last couple of years—outlining sensible reforms to the private Members' Bill system, many of which reflect the eminently sensible system in the Scottish Parliament, where a Bill that has cross-party support can continue to make progress. Should not that system be adopted here?

Pete Wishart: My hon. Friend is utterly right. The Procedure Committee has looked at the issue on several occasions—four that I can remember—and each time has made strong and sensible proposals, suggestions and recommendations on how we should address it.

The time is right, given that we have the two-year Session. Let us vow to resolve the outstanding issues in our private Members' Bill system and ensure that we get something that is fit for purpose, something that ensures we have the respect of our constituents and something that enables us to work across the parties. I would love to work with the hon. Member for Shipley on horse-racing issues or on another interest that he and I share, but we cannot do that because he would probably filibuster a Bill so that I could not get it through. I am most surprised that he is a sponsor of the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). Perhaps that suggests a change in attitude and approach—a mellowing over the years. He might actually be constructively engaged in some of these issues. *[Interruption.]* I hear, "Don't hold your breath," from one of his colleagues and I will not do so.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): While the hon. Gentleman is making accusations about my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), it may help to point out that my hon. Friend spoke for over an hour on my private Member's Bill and made some very constructive points, even though he opposed it. He did not just oppose it for opposition's sake.

Pete Wishart: I am actually a great fan of the speeches by the hon. Member for Shipley. He has a unique talent for filibustering. I just wish he would not do it on private Members' Bill days, when we are trying to get things through the House. He seems to be able to speak for hours and hours on these things. It is something that new Members of the House might have to look at to see how to do it.

We will support the amendments put forward by the hon. Member for Rhondda and the Labour Front Bench. We fundamentally and profoundly agree that we must have a routine for private Members' Bills that respects the fact that this is a two-year Session of Parliament. To have 13 days for private Members' Bills is clearly insufficient. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Shipley that the Rolls-Royce solution is to have another ballot

[*Pete Wishart*]

next year. That is something that the Government will not do, so what should we do in the face of the Government's refusal to do that? Surely the sensible approach is to ensure sufficient time for the private Members' Bills that we already have, which would possibly allow more to progress through this House than we would normally expect.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): The hon. Gentleman said that it would be the Rolls-Royce solution to have a second ballot—my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) made a perfectly good point about that—but nobody has asked for that and it is not in the amendment.

Pete Wishart: How about the hon. Lady and I campaign to ensure that we get that in place? If she agrees with me—some of her hon. Friends look like they might also agree with her—let us do it, because that is surely the solution we need. Now, we will not get that—the Government have made it clear that it will not happen—so what we need is an arrangement for the existing private Members' Bills that properly reflects the two-year Session.

We have a long affection for private Members' Bills on these Benches. We had the first SNP private Member's Bill last year, when Eilidh Whiteford, the former Member for Banff and Buchan, got her private Member's Bill on the Istanbul convention through the House—it was probably opposed by some Conservative Members. Last year we had four private Members' Bills in the top 10—there were some fantastic ones proposed—but we were really pleased for our former colleague Eilidh Whiteford and proud that she managed to get hers through the House last year. We also have two this time round, and I look forward to the fantastic private Members' Bills to be proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald)—they are no longer in their places. I look forward to hearing them support their Bills in the House.

We need certainty about private Members' Bills, because while it is quite easy for some colleagues on the other side of the Chamber to get back and forth to the House of Commons on Fridays, it is not so easy for Members from Scotland. Getting down to the House of Commons to take part in these debates involves getting on a plane which takes probably in the region of four to seven hours. We therefore need certainty about when sitting Fridays will be, and we are grateful to the Leader of the House, who has listed the seven sittings we will secure over the next year.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I declare an interest as the person who came fifth in the private Members' Bill ballot—the highest on this side of the House. By the hon. Gentleman's logic, he is arguing for more sitting Fridays, when it would be even harder for people from Scotland to come down here, and nowhere in his argument does he acknowledge the fact that the most important stage of a Bill's progress is Committee, which can go on for weeks and weeks and is not subject to any of the criticisms of what may happen on a Friday. Surely that is an important part of a Bill's progress, yet he is making no proposals about that, and it is not being curtailed.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because he makes a very good point about the Committee stage of private Members' Bills—there is one that I particularly support and I hope to be a member of the Committee. What I am asking for is not to abandon these sitting days, but to have certainty about when they will be available. We are grateful that the first ones have been listed, but if we are to have further days for consideration of private Members' Bills, as the Leader of the House seemed to suggest, surely it is only right, proper and appropriate that they are listed now, so that we get that certainty. We have to make a massive effort—maybe not the effort that the hon. Gentleman has to make—to get to this House readily and easily. It is not easy to get down here and back from Perthshire on a Friday. This is about ensuring certainty about the dates. The Leader of the House suggested that there might be further days; all we are asking is that we get them in place.

I will end by saying a little about private Members' Bills and their importance to the House. Our constituents like private Members' Bills. I can tell new Members that they will probably be lobbied on private Members' Bills more than on any other pieces of legislation in their time as Members of Parliament. People like that private Members' Bills are usually cross-party and consensual, and they like the way that private Members' Bills are usually on issues that they feel are important to them, so let us make sure that we respect our constituents' wishes. Given the vacuity of the Government's legislative programme, it also has to be said that private Members' Bills will probably be the most interesting and exciting Bills that we will consider in this Session, so let us make sure that we get the necessary time to consider them properly.

I will end with one plea. Of course we will support the amendments, but let us get the whole issue of private Members' Bills properly resolved, so that we do not have my friend the hon. Member for Shipley continuing to talk them out.

9.4 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to you for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker. As a new Member, I hope you will excuse me for not being entirely au fait with all the rules and procedures of this place. When it comes to the big principles, however, I can say that I was elected by the people of Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport to create action, and to shine a light on some of the historic procedures that we have in this place.

The motion strikes me as incredibly sound and reasonable. It proposes that in a normal parliamentary Session, which is generally a year, a set number of days should be allotted to private Members' Bills, as should happen in the case of Opposition day debates.

Philip Davies: And ballots.

Luke Pollard: Indeed.

If the procedures are to be changed in such a way that a year becomes two years—the Session becomes larger and the aeon, or era, goes on for longer—we should reflect that in the way we operate in this place.

I am frustrated because I did not come into Parliament to talk about procedure, and part of me really dislikes my standing up and speaking in this way. I was elected to come here and deliver action. If the Government are not able to implement their manifesto because of the arithmetic of this place and the unpopularity of some of their policies—both on their own Benches and among the public—Back Benchers on both sides of the House should be able to introduce legislation that will make a difference, be it small in some cases or large in others. It is the promise of Westminster to all Back Benchers that they will be able to change the law of the land to help their constituents, and that is what I think we should be discussing here today.

Having watched the proceedings of the House on television, I am now part of those proceedings as a new Member. The idea of filibustering on Bills is something that the majority of our electorate find abhorrent. They want to see politicians achieve change by having debates. The possibility that we will not have opportunities to introduce legislation is something that I imagine people in Plymouth and elsewhere will find a little curious.

I do not want to play procedural games, if only because I am surrounded by people who are, I fear, much better at it than I am. Let me simply say that if we are to have a Session that lasts for two years, not one, it seems logical and fair to me—both as a new Member and as someone who is trying my best to represent the people who elected me—for the number of private Members' Bills to be scaled according to the length of the Session.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): Is it not also an issue that our constituents who are watching all this expect us to come here for a certain number of days? The fact that Her Majesty's Opposition are absolutely totally useless, and would really rather we were not here at all—[HON. MEMBERS: "Her Majesty's Opposition?"] I am happy to replace the word "useless" with a number of other adjectives. But is it not also true that our constituents expect us to be here for 13 sitting Fridays, when we can discuss private Members' Bills?

Luke Pollard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention. As someone who fought the 2010 and 2015 general elections, I spent seven years trying to get to this place, and I do not mind spending a few more on sitting Fridays, helping legislation along the way.

What worries me about this debate is that, to the average folk in Plymouth, it looks as though we are playing procedural games. We are not spending the time debating food banks or the crisis in our national health service. We are not looking into why the M5 stops at Exeter and does not extend to the Tamar bridge and Plymouth. We are not discussing the issues that arise on the doorstep. We are discussing procedural games because the Government have chosen to play those procedural games, cancelling the Queen's Speech and elongating this Session without correspondingly carrying over measures in a fair way. That tactic strikes me as a 1970s throwback and something that should have been consigned to the past. We should be striving for a 21st-century Parliament with 21st-century procedures and policies, which would enable Back Benchers to introduce legislation if they so chose.

Philip Davies: Has the hon. Gentleman told the Opposition Chief Whip that tonight will mark the end of procedural games in Parliament? According to my experience of being on the Opposition Benches, procedural games are one of the few things that Oppositions have at their disposal to try to cause trouble for the Government. Has the hon. Gentleman clarified with the Chief Whip that the Labour party is tonight ruling out the use of procedural games during the current Parliament?

Luke Pollard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention—I think that is the polite response I am supposed to give. I want to talk about food banks and the issues that really matter. I appreciate that he has strong views on the matter, but so do I. My view is that the opportunity that Back-Bench Members have to bring forward legislation in a two-year Session should be proportionate to that which they have in a single-year Session.

My name was not drawn in the private Members' Bills ballot, but if it had been I would bring forward legislation to extend the voting franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds, which I think would be a perfect antidote to what is happening in this debate. Instead of locking ourselves in the past with procedures that do not reflect the everyday, common decency of the pub that would say, "If you have a one-year Session, you have this number of days for private Members' Bills; if you extend the Session by this much, you extend the numbers of days by this much," we could talk about how to get young people involved in politics, which would hopefully shine a light on the workings of this House and make them better and fairer.

When I go back to Plymouth for the recess, I want to be able to hold my head up high and say that I was defending my constituents' rights and responsibilities in this place. As a lowly Back Bencher, I want to be able to support other Back Benchers bringing forward legislation that could make a difference. The Government seem to be caught like a rabbit in the headlights of their party's right wing, unable to bring forward the manifesto that they were elected on, unable to propose the solutions that we really need, and unable to stand up to scrutiny on various issues. Let us bring forward those debates on WASPI and the public sector pay cap, and the private Members' Bills that would allow each and every one of us to adjust something along the way. For a baker's dozen of extra private Members' Bills, I hope that the House will support the amendment.

9.11 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The Opposition's view on the motion is not about causing trouble; it is about maintaining an important democratic principle of this House, which is that in a two-year Session that has already been declared it is perfectly legitimate and fair that the Government should allocate a proportionate number of days for private Members' Bills. They could do that tonight if they wanted to. That is why we support the amendments on the Order Paper.

I want to refer briefly to some of the successful private Members' Bills that reached the statute book in 2016-17, to illustrate the importance of that route and of sitting Fridays. The Merchant Shipping (Homosexual Conduct) Act 2017, introduced by the hon. Member for

[Angela Smith]

Salisbury (John Glen), is really important legislation that omits from the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 the sections that make homosexual acts grounds for dismissal from the crew of merchant ships. It makes society fairer and eliminates very serious discrimination from the statute book.

Mr Kevan Jones: The need for that legislation came to light when we were passing the Armed Forces Act, when we were able to remove that provision in relation to the armed forces but not in relation to the merchant navy. That came forward as a private Member's Bill, rather than the Government using their time to do it.

Angela Smith: My hon. Friend strengthens and enhances my point. We need the route offered to us by private Members' Bills to correct failures by Government to deal with such important issues.

The Scottish National party Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), has already referred to the very important measure introduced by the previous Member for Banff and Buchan, Eilidh Whiteford, the Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Ratification of Convention) Act 2017, which relates to ratification of the Istanbul convention. The House overwhelmingly agreed to that on a sitting Friday through the private Member's Bill route, yet even now the Government have not acted upon the instructions of the House. Rather than denying the democratic rights of Members of this House, the Government would do better to spend their time ensuring that the democratic will of the House is observed in letter and in spirit.

Finally, I want to refer to two measures predating 2016-17. My Bill did not immediately make it on to the statute book but became law when the dangerous dogs legislation made it possible to prosecute people for dog attacks that occurred on private property. It took about five years to get it on to the statute book, but we got there in the end. The private Member's Bill route—the Friday sittings—made that possible.

The co-operation of both Front Benches in the closing months of the 2010-15 Government made possible the Control of Horses Act 2015, introduced by the hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy). Why can we not have that co-operation now? If the Government believe in consensus, they should act on it and give us the time on Fridays.

9.15 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I will be brief. Unusually, I find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies). We are perpetuating the myth that we as individual Back Benchers are legislators; other than in very rare cases, we are not. The reality is that if any Bill does not attract the veto of the hon. Gentleman or of anyone who cares to join him and does not have Government approval, it will most probably be procedurally talked out by a Minister standing at the Dispatch Box and making sure it does not pass. Unless and until we as a House decide we want to make this system work, it is a sham, and we are fooling the public into believing that Bills will be passed that never stand a snowball's chance in hell of doing so.

9.16 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I started the day, as perhaps did some others, by listening to an excerpt of "Night of the Living Dead" to commemorate the passing of George Romero, the creator of the modern-day zombie, and now, twice in one evening, we are discussing the zombie Government that those on Treasury Bench have become. While they have lost their majority, and some would say their authority, they do have control of the parliamentary timetable and are turning the screws on that. We have heard about the disappearing Opposition days, and now we turn to the topic of private Members' Bills.

I listened carefully to what the Leader of the House said, but it was vague in the extreme. We are still no clearer on whether we will have the commensurate increase in the number of Opposition days that this unusually long two-year Parliament demands; it should be 26 days, not 13, and nothing less.

Let us think about some of the contents of the ill-fated Conservative manifesto that did not make it into the Queen's Speech, such as the dementia tax. I remember the Prime Minister was in my constituency when she came a bit unstuck; all the TV pictures were of one of my constituents arguing on the doorstep with her about the detail of that. The 25-year environment plan does not seem to have made it into the Queen's Speech either, and nor do grammar schools or foxhunting; all these bits of the manifesto are on the scrapheap. The First Secretary of State and Minister for the Cabinet Office said the other day that the Conservatives do not have a "monopoly on wisdom" and the Prime Minister was inviting suggestions; if they are bereft of ideas, private Members' Bills on a Friday are a good way of plugging that gap.

It has been said before that our constituents send us to this place because they want us to debate issues and vote on legislation. In the last Parliament, I cut my teeth in Opposition days and private Members' Bill debates on Fridays. The first topics I spoke on were our Wednesday debates on the NHS. I was never lucky enough to have my blue-sky thinking translated into anything that would get on to the statute book, but I did attend Friday debates on private Members' Bills promoted by hon. Friends: the Off-patent Drugs Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), and the Hospital Parking Charges (Exemption for Carers) Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper). None of them saw the light of day as they were filibustered out of existence by certain Members; I will not name names—although they are on the Government Benches. [Interruption.] Yes, the Bills that did make it were the ones that had the Government's fingerprints all over them—the handout Bills. I remember being involved in a complex radio services Bill in which someone was going on ad infinitum about their favourite radio stations and pop groups. To the public outside, this looks like a denial of democracy; it looks really bad.

When private Members' Bills are given the time they need and properly debated, they represent Parliament at its best. People remember September 2015 when we debated the Assisted Dying Bill. A lot of Members came in on that Friday. The numbers for the vote were 118 and 330, so it is possible to get Members here on a

Friday if things are given time. Okay, the Bill did not change the law, but the debates on both sides had a good airing.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), speaking for the Scottish National party, mentioned the vote on the Istanbul convention, which also took place on a Friday, as did a vote this February on vital legislation on violence against women and girls. The zombie Parliament is carrying on, however.

We can construct a long list of things that have changed the way in which modern society operates, the origins of which were in private Members' Bills. Examples included the decriminalisation in 1967 of homosexual acts between two consenting adults over the age of 21, the ending of the death penalty and the legalisation of abortion. All those changes came from private Members' Bills. Hunting with dogs has cropped up a number of times; it was under a Labour Government that foxhunting was outlawed. The plans for a free vote on that under this Government seem to have bitten the dust as well.

Members have said that the Procedure Committee has recommended reforms to private Members' Bill procedures. However, the Government do not appear to be entertaining the idea of reversing the filibuster farce and the curtailing of debate. They have dismissed those concerns out of hand. During this Parliament, we have seen how my hon. Friends the Members for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) and for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) have secured the revenge of the Back Benchers. That is what happens in a zombie Parliament, and it should be encouraged by allowing the commensurate amount of debate on private Members' Bills for a two-year Parliament. We need 26 days, and nothing less.

This is part of a pattern. No Select Committees are to be constituted before the autumn. We saw the withdrawal of Short money in the last Parliament, and the Conservatives' 2017 manifesto had a lot of really illiberal constitutional stuff in it. For example, they were soldiering on with their boundary reviews for 2015 registrants for an election that will not happen until 2022—or will it? Do they know something that we do not? This has gone beyond an issue solely for constitutional anoraks. An e-petition on the reform of private Members' Bill procedures last year got 50,697 signatures. I urge everyone to support the amendment calling for a pro rata allocation of the time to debate such Bills. We need 26 days, and nothing less. Do not let the zombies win, because democracy will be the loser.

9.22 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I want to speak to my amendment, but first I want to respond immediately to the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), who said that I should declare my interest. I would argue that of all Members in the House, I probably have the least interest in extending the number of days this year, because I came top of the ballot. It is those Members who came further down the ballot—at No. 5, No. 10, No. 15 and No. 20, for example—who perhaps have a greater interest in this. I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman and all other hon. Members will unite on 20 October and turn up here to vote for my Bill to ensure that our emergency workers do not get spat at and attacked when they are doing their work. I hope that my Bill will attract his support, briefly, and that of Government Ministers. We have yet to see whether that will happen.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said that the Standing Orders provide for 13 private Members' Bill days in a Session, but that is not true when we have a short Session, is it? We just curtail in those circumstances; we do not say that we have to have another six private Members' Bill days before the end of the Session. The truth is that this is a bit of a conundrum, but it is the Government who have the power to decide the length of the Session. That is why it is only fair play for the Government, when they decide that a Session is to last for two years, to provide two years' worth of private Members' Bill days.

The hon. Gentleman says that there should be a second ballot. That might be a great idea, but only the Government can table an amendment to that effect—

Philip Davies *indicated dissent.*

Chris Bryant: No, no. If we had tabled such an amendment to today's business, it would not have been selectable. There is no way that we could have tabled it today. The only thing that is open to us is to table the extra 13 days.

To be absolutely clear, my amendment would add another 13 days and therefore give many hon. and right hon. Members a further opportunity to get legislation on the statute book. Why does that matter? The first thing that we get asked by every sixth-former is, "If you had a chance to change the law, what is the one thing that you would do?" We are all used to answering that question, and we sometimes get that chance. I just think that more of us should have that opportunity. In this two-year Parliament, we could have ten-minute rule Bills or presentation Bills or Bills from people in the private Members' Bills ballot.

Philip Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: I am not going to give way, because I look forward to hearing the hon. Gentleman just say yes on 20 October.

If the Government wanted, they could make a Session last five years. Would there be only 13 days for private Members' Bills then? In theory, yes, but according to the laws of moral justice in this House, I would say not. Why do I not trust the Government on this? The Leader of the House has said a couple of times on Thursday mornings that she is minded to look at adding extra days, but she then tabled a motion that allows for 13 days through to 23 November 2018. That does not suggest to me that she thinks there should be the proportionate number for two years. In this case, we are not being given the argument straight. I tabled my amendment for an additional 13 days, because if the Government win the vote today, I do not believe that the Leader of the House will come back with another motion for any more days.

When Richard Crossman introduced the Standing Order that we are dealing with today, he allowed for 22 private Member's Bill days a year, saying:

"This reflects the increasing importance which Private Members' Bills have assumed in the last year or two; and I am pleased to see from the reports so far published about the subjects likely to be selected by Members successful in this year's Ballot that hon. Members are still prepared to come forward with bold proposals for the solution of social problems of the day."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 1967; Vol. 754, c. 259.]

[Chris Bryant]

That was in 1967, when they had just passed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) was right to say, a Bill that partially decriminalised homosexuality. It did not go the whole way, and it took a considerable period for that to happen. It was not until a Labour Government had to push it through the House of Lords using the Parliament Act that we ended up with an even and equal age of consent. However, it started as a private Member's Bill and then became a Government Bill. As my hon. Friend also said, the end of the death penalty came through because Members battled month after month, and votes for women happened because people tabled private Members' Bills year after year and made Parliament make up its mind. In the end, it was a Government Bill that allowed women the vote in 1918—100 years ago next year.

Tomorrow will be the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality. Every single one of us would like to have done something as historic as that, and if we hung up our boots or the voters chucked us out at the next general election, that is absolutely fine. All we are trying to do today is say, "You know what? We could make private Members' legislation better. We could make good Bills that don't just depend on Ministers." The Government Members I know are real parliamentarians and would desperately love to do something as significant as the things that we are talking about tonight, which is why I beg, urge and implore them to vote for my amendment tonight. They will know that they will have done a good thing.

9.28 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): In the previous debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) talked about the power of the Executive not only over controlling the agenda, but over ensuring that laws that are in manifestos get through. However, we are in a unique position in this two-year Session of Parliament. As my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and for Rhondda said, the important thing is that private Members' Bill are sometimes big pieces of legislation that are too hot to handle—too hot for the Government to put through.

Many private Members' Bills have gone through this House that make a real difference to people's lives. I introduced the Christmas Day (Trading) Act 2004, which means that large shops cannot open on Christmas day—the Act was good for shop workers who were forced to work on Christmas day. In the same Session, Jim Sheridan, the former hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North, introduced the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004, which brought in tough regulation following the tragedy at Morecambe bay to try to protect people from being exploited by gangmasters. Private Members' Bills can make a real change to people's lives.

I am a bit concerned that the Leader of the House says she is minded to announce additional days. How many additional days would she like to propose, and what are the criteria for introducing them? The current logic is that 13 days will be spread over a two-year Session. The hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) made the argument, with which I have some sympathy,

that it is in the Government's hands to move an amendment if they wish to have another ballot for private Members' Bills in the second year.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) said, in the 2015-16 Session, 20% of successful private Members' Bills did not come through the ballot but came through the ten-minute rule procedure and other routes. The hon. Member for Shipley is arguing that, somehow, my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda and others who have been successful in the ballot will have an unfair advantage, but I am not sure that will be the case. Other hon. Members will have a chance to get their private Members' Bills on the statute book.

The hon. Member for Shipley thinks of himself as a great filibusterer on a Friday, but he pales into insignificance compared with the former right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, the great Eric Forth, with whom I successfully did a deal to pass my private Member's Bill because he wanted to stop a Bill lower down the Order Paper.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) mentioned the proposal to move debates on private Members' Bills to Tuesday and Wednesday nights, thereby getting round the travel difficulties of Scottish National party Members on Fridays. Are private Members' Bills an area ripe for reform? Yes, they are. We must not only show our constituents that we are listening to them but must enact Bills that are relevant to them. Private Members' legislation is important.

I am not sure whether the Government have limited Friday sittings by mistake, or because they want to keep the decks clear or to ensure that nothing controversial is introduced in the next two years, as some Government Back Benchers might vote against the Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda made the fundamental point that there are few opportunities in this place to change legislation, but we can do it in Bill Committees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge mentioned the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in the merchant navy, which was originally raised during the passage of the Armed Forces Act 2016. We managed to get the discriminatory legislation on the merchant navy changed through a private Member's Bill with the Government's agreement. Again, the issue had been overlooked for many years, and it was only because of our scrutiny in this House that we could get rid of that discriminatory legislation on the military and the merchant navy. So I would support the amendments. It is nonsense to suggest that by giving these additional days the world is going to stop—it is not. It is going to allow Back Benchers, either through the ballot or through private Members' business, to ensure that their voices are heard and that they can make a real difference in trying to get some of those Bills past even the hon. Member for Shipley.

Question put. That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 285, Noes 315.

Division No. 8]

[9.35 pm]

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Alexander, Heidi

Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike

Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris

Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Killen, Gerard
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter

Laird, Lesley
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Ms Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart
 Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 O'Mara, Jared
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela

Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul J.
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds,
 Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Thangam Debonnaire and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Dockerill, Julia
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine

Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon

Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Liddington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy

Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie

Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David

Warman, Matt
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Nigel Adams and
David Rutley

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: (b), leave out from 'That' to end and insert:

' , notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14(8) relating to the number of Fridays on which Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business, Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 20 and 27 October, 3 and 10 November, 1 and 8 December 2017, 19 and 26 January, 2, 16 and 23 February, 16 March, 27 April, 11 and 18 May, 15 and 22 June, 6 and 13 July, 19 and 26 October, 16 and 23 November 2018, 18 January, 15 February and 15 March 2019.'—
(*Chris Bryant*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 316.

Division No. 9]

[9.53 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah

Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie

Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Fellows, Marion
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glendon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mr Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike

Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Gerard
Kinnoch, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammey, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lee, Ms Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorris, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Graham
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
O'Mara, Jared
Onasanya, Fiona
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Peacock, Stephanie
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke

Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Laura
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris

Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sweeney, Mr Paul J.
Swinson, Jo
Tami, Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Dr Paul
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
**Thangam Debbonaire and
Jeff Smith**

NOES

Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve

Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishty, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn

Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dockerill, Julia
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy

Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda

Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith

Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Thomson, Ross
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Vera, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Nigel Adams and
David Rutley

Business without Debate

USE OF THE CHAMBER (UNITED KINGDOM YOUTH PARLIAMENT)

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the work of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament in providing young people with an opportunity to engage with the political process; recognises the positive contribution to such engagement provided by the annual meetings of the Youth Parliament in the Chamber of this House; and accordingly resolves that the UK Youth Parliament should be allowed to meet once a year in the Chamber of this House for the duration of this Parliament.—(*Andrea Leadsom.*)

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Would it be in order for this place to record that as a result of Labour's filibustering tonight, this Chamber will not debate the appalling abuse that many women Conservative candidates endured during the general election from the hard left? Would it also be in order for this place to record that there are many Conservative Members who stood up for Labour women when they were abused by their hard-left leadership?

Mr Speaker: I can assure the right hon. Lady that her conduct on this occasion has been entirely orderly. It was open to her to raise that matter in the way that she did, and she has done so.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Would it be in order for me to say that it has been suggested to me that I did not raise the point as to quite how useless Her Majesty's Government are during the last debate? I would like to put that on the record, if I may.

Mr Speaker: Not only is that cheeky, but it is evident from her rather guilty smile that the hon. Lady herself is aware of the nature and extent of the cheekiness. The hon. Lady advised me that she wished to raise a point of order to correct the record because she felt that she had misspoken, so I thought there was going to be an air of contrition, not an attempt to score a party political point. But what the hon. Lady has said is on the record. Let us now preserve an orderly atmosphere as the Secretary of State for Transport makes his way to the Dispatch Box to deliver his statement.

Question accordingly negated.

Main question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 20 October, 3 November, 1 December 2017, 19 January, 2 and 23 February, 16 March, 27 April, 11 May, 15 June, 6 July, 26 October and 23 November 2018.

HS2 Update

10.12 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):

I am grateful to you for allowing this statement, Mr Speaker. I am pleased to be here in front of the House tonight. As you know, sometimes these things can happen as a result of cock-up rather than conspiracy.

Today marks a major milestone in the Government's plans to deliver High Speed 2. High Speed 2 will deliver economic growth across the United Kingdom. It will provide the rail network with the capacity we need for the next century, faster journeys and better connections between cities across the UK.

As announced to the House this morning, we will be awarding stage 1 of the main works civil engineering contracts for the phase 1 route from London to Birmingham. This stage primarily covers design and pre-construction activities, although it is worth saying that the initial works have already begun. We expect these contracts to be signed by the end of this month after the completion of the mandatory standstill period. The expected total value of these contracts covering stages 1 and stage 2, which is the full construction phase, is £6.6 billion. They will support around 16,000 jobs across the country and are expected to generate around 7,000 contract opportunities in the supply chain, of which I expect around 60% to go to small and medium-sized enterprises. I have also confirmed the shortlists for the station design contracts and Euston master development partner procurements.

As well as that announcement, today I am introducing the phase 2a High Speed Rail (West Midlands - Crewe) Bill to the House. This seeks the powers to construct HS2 from the west midlands to Crewe so that this important section, which links up to the west coast main line just south of Crewe, can open in 2027.

The design of the route set out in the Bill is largely as announced in 2015. However, there are three refinements I have decided to make, following consultation last year. I have decided to move the connection to the west coast main line and the start of a tunnel in Crewe further south. I have also decided to move the construction railhead, and subsequently the infrastructure maintenance facility for this part of HS2, from the Basford area near Crewe to a location near Stone. I am very sensitive to the impact that that could have on the local community, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) has diligently drawn to my attention, but I believe this site is a better location from which to construct and maintain phase 2a. The new location near Stone is strategically located midway along the phase 2a route, which means that it can support construction activities heading north and south simultaneously, offering significant programme and construction benefits. Of course, the site at Stone benefits from good transport links, with access to the M6 and the existing rail network right at that location.

In Crewe, moving the railhead from the Basford area avoids planned housing regeneration in that part of Cheshire. It also negates the need for maintenance loops at Pipe Ridware, thereby reducing impacts along the phase 2a route. It is worth saying that that area of Basford is one of Cheshire's most significant economic development and housing development sites, and I have

been very sensitive to that. The construction railhead and infrastructure maintenance facility have been carefully designed so as to minimise impacts locally, particularly on the community of Yarnfield. Having heard local concerns, I have made sure that Yarnfield Lane will remain open.

In preparing the Bill, HS2 Ltd has sought to minimise impacts on the environment and on communities. Following the deposit of the Bill, there will be a consultation on the scheme's environmental statement. That will provide the opportunity to comment on the environmental effects of the proposed phase 2a scheme and the reasonable alternatives considered and reported by HS2 Ltd. The process will result in a report from an independent assessor, which will be provided to all Members of the House before Second Reading.

Turning to Crewe, the HS2 business case has always included two trains per hour stopping at Crewe. The phase 2a Bill includes the interventions needed to support that, but I know that there is a strong ambition to achieve even more. Today, I am therefore launching a consultation on options to develop a Crewe hub. This work shows how such a service pattern could support an HS2 service to Stoke-on-Trent and bring benefits to places like Chester, north and south Wales, Shrewsbury and Derby. Future decisions will be subject to affordability and value for money. Funding the broader vision for a Crewe hub will require national and local government to work together, but I believe that there is the potential to deliver even more benefits.

Finally today, I am announcing my decision on the outstanding sections of the phase 2b route to Manchester and Leeds, which we consulted on last year. After carefully considering the responses to the consultation, I have decided to confirm the following changes to the route. The western leg rolling stock depot will move from a site near Golborne to a site north of Crewe. That site will be included in the full environmental assessment being undertaken for the whole route and I will look carefully at that assessment.

A 26 km section of the route in the Middlewich and Pickmere area of Cheshire will change and be raised as it passes through the Cheshire salt plains, to avoid brining and gas storage infrastructure. The approach to Manchester Piccadilly station will be adjusted to improve operational efficiency and reduce impacts on residential areas and a primary school. The route near East Midlands airport will now closely follow the eastern side of the A42. This avoids tunnelling under the airport and reduces the impacts on some communities. At Long Eaton, after much consultation with the local community, the route will pass through the town on a high viaduct.

The route in South Yorkshire will be the route we consulted on in 2016, which in part follows the M1 and M18, and serves Sheffield city centre via a spur from the HS2 line. I am also asking HS2 Ltd to take forward the provision of a northern junction back on to HS2, giving a city centre to city centre connection between Leeds and Sheffield in less than 30 minutes. That is very important for the development of Northern Powerhouse Rail. We will also continue to work on a possible parkway station.

Finally, I have decided not to proceed with the proposed change of route to the east of Measham. Instead, I am confirming a modified version of the 2013 preferred route to the west of Measham. In Measham itself, the route is

moved approximately 80 metres and the viaduct extended to mitigate commercial property impacts. I have heard the concerns raised by local communities about the proposed eastern leg rolling stock depot at Crofton. HS2 Ltd believes it has found a better option, on which I am now consulting, which is east of Leeds in the Aire valley, adjacent to the M1 on a brownfield site.

I intend to bring forward a third hybrid Bill for phase 2b in 2019. In preparation for that Bill, HS2 Ltd is today launching a consultation on the technical scope and methodology to be used in the environmental and equality impact assessments.

Today's decisions bring certainty for communities who have been unsure of the route for some years. I am updating the safeguarding directions for the phase 2b route to protect the land required for the construction and operation of the line. I can also confirm that the same range of property schemes currently operating for phases 1 and 2a will be available for phase 2b. This goes over and above what is required by law and gives assistance to those along the line of the route. I have also made amendments to some of the detailed urban/rural boundaries for phase 2b and to the treatment of properties around tunnel portals.

A report published today by property specialists Carter Jonas tells us that the particular circumstance of the Shimmer estate development in Mexborough, South Yorkshire means that this package may not allow some homeowners to acquire a similar property in their local area. In the light of the report's findings, I therefore also confirm that the Government will ensure that Shimmer homeowners can secure a comparable home, as referred to in my summary document "High Speed Two: From Concept to Reality", which is also being published today. That is really important.

We need HS2. Since privatisation, the number of passenger journeys on our railways has doubled. It has nearly tripled on the key west coast inter-city corridor. We cannot continue to rely on the legacy of our Victorian forebears, far-sighted though they were. By providing new routes for inter-city services, HS2 will free up space on our existing railways. It will reduce overcrowding and allow options for more varied and frequent services, including for places that currently do not have a good connection to London. This released capacity could allow more freight trains. It could also more than double the current number of peak-time seats on busy services from Manchester Piccadilly towards Stoke and Crewe, and from Leeds towards Wakefield. It has the potential to almost double peak seats from London to Peterborough and east coast destinations further north.

Any significant investment needs to offer good value for money, as HS2 does. Today I am publishing the updated business case for phase 2, which shows that, including the wider economic benefits, the full HS2 network will create £2.30 of benefit for every £1 spent. We want to make the most of our investment in HS2. When phase 1 becomes operational, HS2 trains will run to Manchester, Liverpool, Preston, Warrington, Wigan and Glasgow. Phase 2 will further reduce journey times between London and Glasgow and Edinburgh to around three hours and 40 minutes. To my Scottish colleagues, let me say that we will continue to work with Transport Scotland and Network Rail to look at the best ways of further reducing times, towards an ultimate ambition of a three-hour journey time between London and Scotland.

We are also looking at opportunities to use HS2 to support Northern Powerhouse Rail and Midlands Connect.

Finally, I know that today's announcement will not be welcome news for those living along the line of the route. There will be concern about how HS2 will affect their homes, communities and businesses. That, sadly, is inevitable if we are going to do big projects of this kind for our nation, but I am determined that we will engage extensively with everyone affected and that we will show fairness, compassion and respect. All the products mentioned today are in the Libraries of both Houses.

Our plan for Britain is a plan to build a stronger, fairer country, with an economy that works for everyone—one in which wealth and opportunity are spread across the country and we are set up to succeed in the long term. Investment in economic infrastructure is a key part of this. HS2 will be the new backbone of the UK rail network. It will transform a rail network built for the 19th century into one designed for the 21st century. It will increase capacity and connectivity across our rail network, bring our country closer together and support economic growth. The benefits of HS2 will be felt across the whole of the United Kingdom. I commend the statement to the House.

10.23 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): May I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement? I also thank you, Mr Speaker, for hearing the point of order made earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) about what could be done to encourage the Secretary of State to better inform the House of the crucial decisions that he has reached on one of the most significant and costly pieces of transport infrastructure that this country has proposed for many a year.

Perhaps the Secretary of State will be kind enough to explain what happened earlier today, given the widespread trailing of an oral statement on the anticipated announcement and the House's subsequent disappointment at initially being asked to settle for a written statement, until such time as the outcry seemingly reached the Transport Secretary's ears and his somewhat belated appearance in the Chamber tonight.

Labour has consistently supported HS2 and the attendant benefits it will bring—indeed, we were its initial proposer in 2009—but that support brings with it many questions. On the construction, there are concerns that companies selected to do the work were previously involved in the practice of blacklisting workers. What assurances can the Secretary of State give that no such practices will be tolerated in the delivery of HS2? Far too often in the case of significant projects in recent times, overseas contractors—and several have been awarded contracts here—have brought in their own labour, and have recruited exclusively from jurisdictions outside the United Kingdom. HS2 clearly represents huge employment and career opportunities for apprentices and established workers alike. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that the practices we have seen in the construction industry that have excluded British workers from UK projects will not be allowed to obtain in the construction of HS2?

There are also concerns about the financial health of Carillion. What measures has the Secretary of State put in place to ensure that any financial instability of any of

[*Andy McDonald*]

the contractors will not delay or add to the cost of the project? He said in evidence to the Treasury Committee that it was not his job to monitor conflicts of interest in the delivery of HS2, but given the revelations of the revolving door between HS2 and the engineering firm CH2M, does he accept that he does, in fact, have such an obligation if the public are to have confidence in the arrangements between HS2 and the contractors?

What assurances and guarantees can the Secretary of State give that the total overall cost will not exceed the stated £55.7 billion, and will not spiral, as has been alleged in certain quarters? In one of the many documents published today, we are told that in adopting the M18 route in south Yorkshire, although HS2 Ltd has included in the costs estimate the delivery of a junction north of Sheffield and back to the HS2 main line, it has not costed electrification of the midland main line between Clay Cross and Sheffield Midland, or from Sheffield to the north. Does the Secretary of State intend the line to be electrified in readiness for HS2—and if so, when—or is he working on the basis that trains to Sheffield will be bimodal, and the line will remain unelectrified?

Will the Secretary of State provide further and better particulars of his proposals and preferences in respect of potential parkway stations? Will he also provide an update on the progress of the northern east-west rail and the extension to the north-east—“Crossrail for the north”—and its connection with HS2, and on what discussions he has had with Transport for the North in that regard? Finally, will he reassure the House that his announcement about progress on HS2 will not be followed by an announcement of yet further delays to electrification of the trans-Pennine route?

Chris Grayling: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (*Andy McDonald*) for the Opposition's continued support for the HS2 project. I hope that we shall be able to work on it together. I think that the House, or a large proportion of it, is united in believing that the project is necessary to the economic development of the future.

As I said a moment ago, I am very pleased to be here now. I should have preferred to be here earlier, but, as I said, it is sometimes a case of cock-up rather than conspiracy.

Let me begin by saying something about the construction contracts. We have contracted a range of significant British companies as part of the awarding of contracts today. A range of consortiums is participating, and many of them are already an integral part of Crossrail, which is our biggest engineering project—and the biggest in Europe. We have a good team of UK and international organisations that are used to working as a team to deliver big infrastructure projects. However, the assurance that I give the hon. Gentleman and the House is that, as I have made clear all along, the companies that win contracts for HS2—whether construction, design or, ultimately, rolling stock contracts—will be obliged to make a commitment to leave a lasting skills footprint. That means apprenticeship programmes and skills development, and I think the two high-speed college campuses that we have established in Birmingham and Doncaster will help to develop real expertise for the future.

The hon. Gentleman talked about Carillion. Carillion is a big UK construction business which is clearly going through a troubled time, and we all hope that it will pull through, because we want to see British business succeed. However, I can tell him that Carillion is part of a consortium in which all the organisations involved have committed to delivering their part of the contract, and I am confident that whatever the position in respect of Carillion, that consortium will deliver the results that we expect.

The hon. Gentleman talked about conflicts of interest and CH2M. As he is aware, it pulled out of that particular contract. I have every intention of ensuring that we have proper behaviour by companies in future; they will be unable to continue to work for us if they do not do the right thing.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the total cost of the project. Over the past 24 hours there have been some wild rumours about the cost, based on people who are not involved in the project putting a finger in the air. I simply remind the House that it is incredible, inconceivable and simply nonsense to suggest that HS2 will cost five times the amount of HS1 per mile. This project has a total cost attached of £55.7 billion. It is currently on time and on budget, and I expect it to stay that way. In this country we have experience of major projects, such as Crossrail and the Olympics, and we have been pretty good at delivering on time and on budget. I am sure that we will carry on doing so.

The hon. Gentleman asked about electrification of the M18 route. I can confirm that the route from Sheffield Midland north to Leeds will also be electrified to ensure that through services can run to Leeds. That link is also an important part of northern powerhouse rail. On parkways stations, work is continuing to look at the best options. With regard to the whole northern powerhouse rail project, I am waiting for Transport for the North to bring forward its proposals. With regard to trans-Pennine modernisation, nothing has changed.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House to make a statement on this important project at this late time of night—I am willing to discuss HS2 with him any time of the night or day. He has put a great deal of confidence in the contractors he announced today, to which he is awarding £6.6 billion of taxpayers' money. However, just by glancing at recent news reports, we see that Strabag, an Austrian firm, is pulling out of a hydroelectric plant contract in Bosnia, having sought to increase the contract price. Skanska UK has revealed major project cost overruns and write-downs of £33 million. Costain has yet to reach a settlement for a private finance initiative project contract with the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority, where it has already incurred £15 million of losses. Last December the Health and Safety Commission confirmed that Kier Infrastructure and Overseas Ltd was being prosecuted for three incidents that took place during the construction of the Crossrail tunnel. That is in addition to Carillion's well documented financial problems, which mean that it is having to restructure. Can he confirm that he knew about all those matters, that he has carried out due diligence on those companies, and that the taxpayer is not in reality carrying unacceptable risks on the construction of HS2?

Chris Grayling: We of course monitor the fitness for contracts of all the companies we award contracts to. The consortia to which we have awarded contracts today are groups of firms that have a track record of delivering major projects for this country, and they also include major British businesses that I want to see succeed. It is really important to ensure that we use the expertise that is already delivering for us and that we also champion British business. The awarding of the contracts does that job.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement, and for his honesty in admitting that today's proceedings are yet another Government cock-up, which is quite the theme.

I have consistently spoken in favour of High Speed 2, so long as Scotland is not excluded. I therefore welcome the Secretary of State's restatement of the aspiration to have a three-hour journey time to Scotland. By contrast, my scheduled journey time today from Glasgow to London was four and a half hours—50% longer—which shows the real benefits that high-speed rail could bring. However, my understanding is that when high-speed trains run on the existing network north of Crewe they will actually run slower than my train did today. Can he confirm that, and if so, what will be done to look at the rolling stock to try to improve that speed?

Can the Secretary of State also advise on the estimated journey time of three hours and 45 minutes when high-speed trains start running to Glasgow, and how much that reduced journey time will be due to the reduced number of stops? Can he confirm in which investment periods upgrades to the west coast main line north of Crewe will take place? A previous KPMG report highlighted some possible negative impacts in Scotland, including a predicted £220 million drop in economic output in Aberdeenshire, if high-speed rail continues without including Scotland. Has he updated the review of those figures, and if not, why was the Secretary of State for Scotland able to tweet that today's announcements on high-speed rail will bring economic benefits to Scotland?

I want to reiterate the concerns about Carillion, which now has the prefix "troubled" when it is mentioned in the newspapers. What engagement has there been with Scottish companies for bids? Will the Secretary of State uphold his predecessor's commitment that offsite constructions will definitely be in Scotland? With regard to today's announcement about the Crewe hub, can he confirm that it will not be to the detriment of services to Scotland or the funding of upgrades north of Crewe? Finally, I offer the small reminder that the devolution of Network Rail to Scotland would allow the Scottish Government to progress upgrades north of the border much quicker.

Chris Grayling: As I said earlier, this project benefits the whole United Kingdom. It will reduce journey times to Scotland, and I am committed to looking at how we ensure those journey times come down on and beyond the HS2 network. I will work closely with my Scottish colleagues to see how best we can achieve that, to deliver what people in Scotland want, which is—*[Interruption.]* Well, I hate to say this to the Scottish National party, but actually we are the ones who just

made ground in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised if I listen to my Scottish colleagues, who seem to me to have their fingers firmly on the pulse of what people in Scotland want. Of course, we will deal with the Scottish Administration, but there is more than one voice for Scotland in this House now.

Service patterns for the future will ultimately depend on timetabling much closer to the time, but I expect to see genuine benefits for people across the network served by HS2 in Scotland, the north of England and north Wales. This investment will lead to better services all around the country. It will deliver better services from the east coast ports; I see my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) in his place, and there is a real opportunity to open new routes to those ports on the existing east coast main line. There is a real opportunity to improve the services to cities off the HS2 network that will be served by HS2 trains—Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Preston, Liverpool. This will benefit people on a very widespread basis.

The hon. Gentleman talks about a drop in economic activity. This is a huge project that will feed the supply chain all around the United Kingdom. So this will be good news for Scottish business, good news for English business, good news for Welsh business and good news for Northern Irish business. This is good news for the United Kingdom as a whole.

The hon. Gentleman talked about Carillion. I would hope that everyone in this House would share my ambition that a British company going through a troubled period pulls through and has a stronger future, and I see no reason, when it is part of a consortium that has agreed collectively to deliver for us, why we should hold its current position against it and take away an opportunity that might help that business recover.

Lastly, I do not see how delivering on a Crewe hub that will help connections to north Wales, for example, should in any way disadvantage Scotland.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, I am profoundly and deeply opposed to phase 2, which goes straight through my constituency from top to bottom. Will he confirm that Yarnfield Lane will be kept open, as he said in his statement, and reconfirm his personal assurance to me that he has instructed officials to prepare plans for a deeper and longer tunnel at Whitmore, Baldwin's Gate and Madeley, and that he will give renewed consideration to the introduction of property bonds, which I have pressed for in the past?

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend; I accept that it is never easy when a project like this comes through a constituency, and I respect the constructive way in which he has approached this on behalf of his constituents. I know he and his constituents feel strongly about it. I can give him an assurance in each of those areas. As he knows, I have been to his constituency and looked at the impact of the route and can confirm that Yarnfield Lane will remain open. I can also confirm that we are looking again at the tunnel issue and how we best deal with the issue of properties, as he discussed. I will continue to have discussions with him and seek to do the best we can for his constituents, whom I know do not welcome this development, necessary though it is for the country as a whole.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement today. Certainty about the route and the timetable for progressing the project is essential if businesses are to have the confidence to invest and create jobs in the region served by HS2. But, as he acknowledged, decisions also present huge challenges for those communities most affected, and HS2 Ltd has rightly been criticised for the way it dealt with communities on phase 1, so what specific action has he taken to ensure improved engagement and address the need to respond promptly, effectively and sensitively to community concerns?

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Lady for her support for the project as a whole. I accept her criticism; I met the HS2 leadership team this week and expressed my concern that that should change. I am absolutely clear that as we go through the process of the hybrid Bill for phase 2a, and the further process for phase 2b, I expect HS2 to do the right thing by the affected communities. I invite any Member of the House to come and see me or the Minister responsible if they feel that that is not happening, and we will seek to ensure that it does.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not wish to embarrass an hon. Member by naming the person, but one hon. Member in the Chamber is standing and seeking to catch my eye despite having just arrived, 21 minutes after the statement began, which is, to put it mildly, a tad cheeky.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. He has confirmed that there will be a major construction site just inside the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). There are no exits to the M6 in that area, between Stone and Crewe, so the A525, which runs through my constituency—and particularly the village of Woore—will be affected. Does he have any idea at this stage of the volume of material that will be transported to the construction site, first by rail and laterally by cross-roads such as the A525?

Chris Grayling: One of the advantages of the site is that it adjoins the west coast main line, and I expect as much as is practical to be delivered and taken away by rail. There certainly will be a road impact, however, as we move towards the construction phase. As we go through the hybrid Bill process, we will discuss that in detail with the Members of Parliament representing the affected constituencies, and I am open to asking Highways England to look at any local amelioration measures that could be put in place to ensure the least possible trouble to the local communities.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I am afraid that the Secretary of State's statement will provoke deep anger among my constituents, not just because of the local impact on them but because they believe, as I do, that this is the wrong choice for jobs, for regeneration, for connectivity and indeed for the ambitions of HS2 for South Yorkshire. I want to ask him two questions in that context. First, the consultation came back 15:1 against the M18 route, so why did he ignore it? Secondly, can he honestly say that this is a better choice for Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham—towns that need to benefit from HS2?

Chris Grayling: I know how strongly the right hon. Gentleman feels about this—he and I have spoken about it—and I give him my personal assurance that I have considered the matter very carefully. The truth is that, when it comes to consultations, there are strong views against an option when it affects a particular community. There is no doubt about that at all. I have considered the regeneration issues around Meadowhall as compared with the current route, and I have considered the engineering challenge of building a large station in the Meadowhall corridor. I have also been mindful of the potential benefits of the direct connection between Sheffield Midland and Leeds for northern powerhouse rail. My judgment, after much consideration and listening to the advice of the HS2 leadership team, is that this is the best option. I accept that the right hon. Gentleman will not agree with my decision, but I give him my personal assurance that I have not taken it lightly. I have listened to what he and others have said and given the matter careful thought. He will disagree with me, but I want him to believe that this was a sincerely taken decision.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): In Broxtowe, many people support HS2—rightly, in my view—because we know that it will bring jobs and growth to the east midlands hub at Toton sidings. People in Trowell will be delighted that the rural scheme for compensation has been extended, and I really do thank the Secretary of State for that decision. However, there will not be the support for the scheme that there should be because of the proposed 60-foot viaduct through the village. Will he give an undertaking that he will look at that again? If he changes his mind about that, the scheme will have widespread support throughout the whole of Broxtowe.

Chris Grayling: As the hybrid Bill goes through its consideration in this House, there will be have to be debates about such issues, and I know that my right hon. Friend and the petitioners will make that point clearly to the Committee. The High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Act 2017 was modified in places in Committee, and it will be open to those who can win an argument with the Committee to secure change.

I also express my thanks to my right hon. Friend for the constructive way in which she has approached the discussions. She is right to say that the regeneration of the Toton site will make a real difference to the east midlands. It is a huge waste at the moment, and I hope to see the project breathe life back into it.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): The Secretary of State referred to the “good news”. This is not good news at all for people in Mexborough and various other places because of the vanity project idea of a station in Sheffield, which has resulted in the spur going straight through the middle of the Bolsover constituency. It is not good news in Newton, where 50 homes are likely to be affected. It is not good news at McArthurGlen in Ashfield, where they were going to increase the number of jobs by 1,000, which has now gone down the pan because of this new route—the so-called HS2 spur. The only decent news is for firms like Carillion, which has been involved in blacklisting. It is almost a mirror image of the current Tory party.

Chris Grayling: I know that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly about this project, which does affect his constituents. I have been clear in saying that it is not

possible to build a project like this without affecting someone—whichever route we chose. In fact, if we had chosen the Meadowhall route instead of the M18 route, more properties would have been demolished. The reality is that we have to take decisions and ensure that we treat the people affected decently. I know that the hon. Gentleman will not agree with me or us about this project, but I assure him that we will seek to treat his constituents fairly.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): When I predicted in 2013 that the cost of HS2 would balloon to £100 billion, I was wrong. It is clear that the project will end up costing the nation an awful lot more than that. Does the Secretary of State share my constituents' concern? They would absolutely expect a Labour Government to wilfully and neglectfully waste taxpayers' money, but they despair at seeing a Conservative Government do exactly that with this project.

Chris Grayling: I know that my hon. Friend also feels strongly about this project, but I remind him that HS2's purpose is to deliver additional capacity in our transport system. It will create the opportunity to double the number of peak-time seats into Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham, and there will be a huge increase into London Euston. It will provide the opportunity for more freight to move off the roads and on to rail. That is what this is all about.

I have heard a lot over the past 24 hours about numbers. The project has a budget of £55.7 billion. This country has a decent track record of late of delivering projects on time and on budget, and I am confident that that is what will happen this time. As far as I can see, those who appear to be telling a different story have no involvement in the project and little direct knowledge of it.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State confirm that he has once again dismissed proposals for cut and over or other adjustments to the route around Normanton? For all the effort and energy that he has put into looking at alternatives for south Yorkshire, he has not looked at alternatives for West Yorkshire. We have no station between Sheffield and Leeds, and many people will see the costs of the development, but not the benefits. In Normanton, for example, despite being less than 20 minutes from Leeds, we have only one train an hour and will not benefit from any of the shift in capacity that he has talked about. Is he not concerned that his approach to HS2, because of its focus on cities, not on any of the links to towns, will only widen the serious gap between cities and towns in this country, which is becoming even more serious than the divide between north and south?

Chris Grayling: The first thing to say is that we have taken a lot of care to try to put mitigation measures in place, and the movement of the depot from Crofton is a case in point. I have looked to try to change the configuration of the route around Barnburgh, and I have been up there myself to look at the locations. I am sure that the right hon. Lady will make further representations to the Committee that considers the Bill. If she looks at the challenges facing the rail network in the north, she will see that it is not about the lines that have lots of stations; it is about the fact that the links between our major cities are caught up by slow trains.

A fast train from Leeds to Manchester across the Pennines is not possible because of all the stations in between, and councils and representatives in the north have been calling for better, faster links between our northern cities, and this project will do that job between Sheffield and Leeds. One reason why I am attracted to the link between Sheffield city centre and Leeds city centre is to provide fast connections between the two.

Ms Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con) *rose*—

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Tatton or Shipley? Esther McVey.

Ms McVey: Good choice, Mr Speaker.

I appreciate that the Secretary of State is seeking to be decisive, but my constituents in Tatton are deeply concerned by what they hear in the media. Will he ensure that my constituents, and I as their representative in Parliament, will be fully involved in the decisions that will hugely affect them, and that he and High Speed 2 will not ride roughshod over their legitimate concerns?

Chris Grayling: This is my first opportunity to welcome my right hon. Friend back to the House. I am delighted to see her, and she will know that, of all the constituencies in the country apart from my own, I know hers well. I used to live there, and I understand the impact on local communities. I give her an assurance that we will do everything we can to be sensitive to the concerns and needs of those communities. As I said earlier, such a project cannot be delivered without it impacting on some people. I know the route through her constituency very precisely, and I can assure her that I will continue to work with her to make sure we minimise the impacts to the maximum degree we can.

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): Between 2013 and 2016, a station at Sheffield Meadowhall was preferred by HS2. Sir David Higgins told me at an MP consultation meeting a few months ago that the station did not go ahead because there was no consensus on Sheffield City Council to build it. The Secretary of State will have seen today's publication of the consultation on the M1/M18 route that goes through three of my villages, which was 15:1 against—a lot of people support Meadowhall. Why do we spend money on consultations if that is the case?

The Shimmer estate at Mexborough was mentioned earlier, and it is estimated that quite a number of houses there will have to come down. On the Broadlands estate at Bramley in my constituency—the estate I live on—at least 81 houses are within 100 metres of HS2, and on the other side is the M18 motorway. The route will be devastating for the constituency, yet HS2 always denies the number of houses that will be affected.

Secretary of State, if HS2 is saying that fewer houses will be affected on the Meadowhall route—I defended that route, which goes through my constituency, too—it is not the truth. I put it in Sir David Higgins's hands months ago, and he still will not give me a figure for what would happen at Meadowhall.

Chris Grayling: We worked through the decision between the two routes very carefully. It is the case that more houses would be demolished on the Meadowhall route than on the M18 route, but the key point is that I have

[Chris Grayling]

taken careful advice from the team working on this, and I have considered the different options. The towns and cities to the west of south Yorkshire prefer one route and the towns and cities to the east of south Yorkshire prefer another. We have tried to take a balanced decision based on what we think is in the best interests of the country. I have given an assurance to the people affected, and I echo it to the right hon. Gentleman's constituents, that we will seek to do the right thing by them. I understand that a project like this is difficult. We need to take decisions in the interest of the country, and we then need to do everything we can to look after those affected.

Philip Davies: There are many people, including in Yorkshire, who think that HS2 is a huge waste of money that could be better spent on infrastructure projects elsewhere in the region. He was bullish about the total figure that HS2 will cost. Will he therefore put a cap on the cost to make sure it does not overrun in the way some people think? At what point does he think HS2 will become too expensive? Or does he support this project whatever its ultimate cost?

Chris Grayling: As the Treasury is paying the bill—

Mrs Gillan: Taxpayers are.

Chris Grayling: The taxpayers are paying the bill, but believe me the Treasury keeps a pretty careful watch on public spending and I have no doubt that it will be keeping a very weather eye on those costs, as will all the various bodies that look at public procurement projects and public construction projects. We have a good recent track record in delivering major projects on time and on budget—people have only to look at Crossrail to see that. We should be self-confident as a nation and say that we can do this. Why would it be the case that other countries can deliver projects such as this and for us to think we cannot—I think we can.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): The strength of HS2 is about expanding the capacity of the rail network as a whole, so will the Secretary of State give me an absolute assurance that Liverpool will be directly connected to a new high-speed line and also to Northern Powerhouse Rail?

Chris Grayling: As the hon. Lady knows, Liverpool is one of the cities that will be served from the start by HS2 trains. When we have finished the Golborne link, I expect that in the end to become part of the connection that becomes Northern Powerhouse Rail, but I am waiting for Transport for the North to bring forward its detailed proposals. My view is that Liverpool will benefit enormously through reduced journey times, but I also expect it to be part of Northern Powerhouse Rail. As she knows, I know the city well and I am keen to make sure it benefits from the investment we are putting in.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Although I welcome the clarity that today's announcement brings to residents of Long Eaton, Sandiacre and Stanton Gate in my constituency, and the extension of the rural service to the south of Long Eaton, some of my constituents who

have lived in their homes for 40 years or more are being offered only two thirds of the value of their homes and cannot afford to buy another home. As HS2 will be of great benefit to the whole nation, does my right hon. Friend agree that nobody should be worse off as a result of it?

Chris Grayling: I do agree, and I am very grateful to my hon. Friend and to the people of Long Eaton; as she knows, we have had a long discussion about whether we should have a high-level embankment or a low-level one, and I hope the solution we have reached is one that her community will support. I am clear that I do not want people to lose out as a result of this, and I extend to the House the request that Members should come to tell me if there are any places where there is a danger of that happening.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Both Scotland and Northern Ireland have been awarded 100% Barnett consequentials from HS2, whereas Wales has had a 0% rating. With independent experts predicting a £100 billion or more cost for HS2, does the Secretary of State not recognise the inherent injustice of denying Wales its fair share?

Chris Grayling: If Members look at what we are doing now, they will see that we are in the process of modernising the signalling on the north Wales line. I am very clear that one beneficiary of the construction of HS2 will be north Wales, which will suddenly have significant additional capacity for services to London, Birmingham and elsewhere. This investment benefits everyone, by freeing up the capacity to deliver the services that they want.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): May I say to the Secretary of State that my constituents in Wimboldsley and Winsford will be devastated by this decision? As he has found an extra £750 million, which has been identified by the TerraConsult report as being needed to build over the salt plains of Cheshire, will he confirm that the environmental impact assessment will consider salt subsidence, which is hugely prevalent in this area, and that he will also dedicate £750 million towards the mitigation that will be needed in respect of the effects of raising the height of HS2 throughout the constituency?

Chris Grayling: We will attempt to make sure that we deliver mitigations where we can. It is worth saying that one question that has been raised is about the cost of this route relative to what counterparts in other European countries would spend, but we are, up and down this route, spending additional money on mitigations that other countries perhaps would not necessarily spend. That is an important part of finding the right balance between investment in infrastructure and trying to do the right thing by the communities affected. I know the concerns my hon. Friend has raised and I assure her that I will continue to work with her and her communities. The environmental assessment must look at these issues and of course when the Bill comes before this House the Committee concerned will also look at them. She and I will carry on working carefully together to make sure we deliver the right outcome—the best possible outcome—for her constituency, which will undoubtedly have parts that do not like what we are doing.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): The original justification for the Hoo Green to Bamfurlong spur was the siting of a stock depot at Golborne. The Secretary of State has confirmed today that that will be moved to Crewe and that he will develop the Crewe hub. The costs for that part of the line have been repeatedly questioned and the devastation it will cause to the two villages of Culcheth and Hollins Green in my constituency has not been taken into account in any economic assessment. Does he accept that this spur is now the whitest of white elephants and yet another example of the concentration of HS2 on big cities and the neglect of its effect on towns?

Chris Grayling: No, I do not, because the Golborne link is an important part of ensuring good connectivity for Preston, Lancaster, Carlisle and Scotland. If we are to deliver better connectivity to Scotland, we need the Golborne link so that the trains can use that route to reduce journey times as much as possible. I am afraid that I do not accept the hon. Lady's point. I understand the reluctance in parts of her constituency to have this piece of the line developed. We will obviously do the right thing by the people affected, but this is an important part of delivering connectivity to the northern part of the country that would not otherwise happen in the same way.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): My right hon. Friend is already well aware of my constituents and my concerns over the route over the Ingestre salt marsh, but will he also consider putting some tunnelling back into the route through my constituency? The only bit of tunnelling that was there has now been removed, yet there are plenty of kilometres that could be tunnelled to avoid the impact on my constituents in Hopton, Marston and other places, including the Staffordshire showground. Will he also consider the impact on transport links across the region as the route in my constituency cuts across the A34, the M6, the A51 and several other A roads that are important for both regional and national infrastructure?

Chris Grayling: On the latter point, I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that we cannot end up with principal routes cut off. The environmental work we are talking about and the hybrid Bill Committee will consider the issues he mentions. I am happy to carry on talking to him about those options, but now, with the Committee, my hon. Friend and others have the opportunity to make the case to parliamentary colleagues about changes that might be necessary. That worked for the phase 1 Bill and the Committee will no doubt give careful thought to what he has discussed in the context of the phase 2 Bill. I will happily keep talking to him about his concerns.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State might remember that I have been a consistent opponent of the project for a very long time. It was £20 billion as a Labour project, then it became a Conservative project and would cost £40 billion, and I was told that I was irresponsible for saying that it would reach £60 billion. It is very clear from the article in *The Sunday Times* only this Sunday that it will cost £100 billion and beyond. I believe that people who elected me and who vote for my party believe that that sort of national treasure should be invested in public services and the

national health service, not in a technology—I hope that he will listen to this—that by 2033 will be as out of date as the canals were by the time the railways arrived.

Chris Grayling: If we roll the clock back 30 years, we were being told that about the rail network, and large chunks of it were closed. I now have hon. Members from all over the place saying, “Can we reopen it?” I am afraid that I do not accept the argument that in 10 or 15 years' time the railways will be redundant. If we are going to maintain a balance between our roads and rail system for transport around the country, we will need investment in both. That is what this is all about. I would simply say to the hon. Gentleman that I accept his view, but I thought the stuff I read in *The Sunday Times* yesterday about cost was absolute nonsense, coming from somebody with no involvement in the project.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Lichfield has been blighted twice by HS2, first by phase 1 and now by phase 2a. Farms are facing devastation in my constituency, with quarries being planned for them under phase 2a. Will the Secretary of State confirm that they can appeal through a petition? His predecessor said that the whole rationale for HS2 was congestion, but is it not the case that most of the congestion is south of Birmingham? I do not believe that phase 2a and phase 2b are necessary. It would save this nation money and I can tell the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), who is on the Front Bench, that this legislation certainly will not have my support when it comes to a vote.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend talks about congestion; he should see the communications that I receive from people in Manchester and Leeds saying, “Our trains and railway lines are full; we need more capacity.” And, for example, our new colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton), is keen to see additional services from Stoke to Birmingham. If we are to have new capacity to deliver new services, we need a bigger network; that is what this is all about. I am absolutely clear that people will have the right to petition and to express their views to the Committee; that is the right and proper process to follow.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will have heard the concerns from across the House about the costs of this contract and the companies involved in the consortium, including Carillion, which has made its profits from the frankly over-inflated rates of return on private finance products. Can he confirm that the contract has been awarded under the auspices of the Private Finance 2 pipeline? Under whatever auspices it has been awarded, will he commit to publishing the guidance that his Department used to undertake the value-for-money assessment for this contract?

Chris Grayling: I can give the hon. Lady an absolute assurance that when it comes to letting contracts, we are not taking the same disastrous approach to private finance as the Labour party did, which led to the huge deficits that brought parts of our national health service into a state of financial chaos. We follow a value-for-money approach that is vetted by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and the National Audit Office. These are value-for-money public contracts to deliver an essential project for the nation.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah yes, the man in the cream suit: Mr Alec Shelbrooke.

Alec Shelbrooke: Bringing some brightness to this late hour.

May I say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the jobs bonanza that will come with moving the depot to Stourton is hugely welcome to Leeds, the Aire valley and my constituents? On the conversation that I had with the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), and on the tunnelling that will take place under Woodlesford, has the Secretary of State given consideration to the site on which the depot will sit? Has he considered putting all the tunnelling equipment and the spoil on brownfield land, so as to minimise the disruption to my villages of Woodlesford and Oulton, and the traffic around them, during construction?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an interesting suggestion that I will pass on to the HS2 team. I am very glad that he supports this alternative site; I think it is the right one, and that people further south will welcome the decision. I have sought, having visited all the route, ways of minimising the impact, but as I said earlier, there are inevitably consequences of a project on this scale.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): May I ask the Secretary of State for a clarification and about a point of omission? On the clarification, he referred to the electrification of the line north of Sheffield to Leeds. Will he confirm that the cost of that is provided for in the decision? Paragraph 2.7.62 of the Department's report talks about the possibility of bimodal trains operating north of Sheffield if the line is not electrified. On the omission, the biggest challenge to his decision is the lack of capacity at Sheffield Midland station. His departmental officials have confirmed that there is capacity for only two trains an hour, yet the proposal is for two HS2 trains from Sheffield to London, two from Leeds to Birmingham through Sheffield, and hopefully more trains from Sheffield to Manchester as part of Northern Powerhouse Rail. How will he deal with that lack of capacity? Where is the money coming from?

Chris Grayling: As we get towards the opening of this part of the route in 2033, we will have to make sure that the necessary capacity is available, but as the hon. Gentleman knows, this is the route that Sheffield City Council has argued for. I have accepted that argument. We will have an electrified route that links HS2 and Leeds via Sheffield; that is really important.

Mr Speaker: Andrew Percy.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker; again, a good choice. I am a huge supporter of HS2; it is absolutely needed for the north of England, as is HS3. However, as the Secretary of State knows, my preference has been for the Sheffield Meadowhall option, which would carry more regeneration benefits for south Yorkshire and the Humber. Given that that has been ruled out, when will we get a decision on the parkway station and its location, and how will we ensure that the rest of south Yorkshire outside Sheffield, and the Humber, benefit from this investment?

Chris Grayling: We are doing the work on the parkway station at the moment, and I am interested in getting the views of my hon. Friend and others on how that might best work. Regarding his constituency, I am waiting for Transport for the North to come forward with its proposals about how to create the connectivity that is in Humberside in the rest of Yorkshire. That is the essential part of the process.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State please confirm to my constituents in Crewe and Nantwich that the hub will be situated at the current Crewe station? Will he also confirm how many stops there will be? Crewe will welcome this if Crewe and the workers in Crewe will benefit from the station, but we need to know that we are getting the right number of stops and that the hub will be in the centre of our town.

Chris Grayling: The answer is that I expect the Crewe hub to be at the current Crewe station. There is huge potential there to develop a much better centre, a much better station and much better capacity around the station. Service patterns will be sorted out in the future, but I expect there to be a regular service, and much better connections to north Wales and elsewhere.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Simon Hoare.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I stand as Hobson's choice, I think, Mr Speaker.

Huskinson and his predecessors will have heard many of the concerns about the Victorian railway network as proposed about this village, that village or the other. He and his colleagues wisely proceeded, and the benefits of economic growth and job creation from the Victorian rail network were very clear. Will my right hon. Friend reflect on the important statement made by the shadow Secretary of State? Notwithstanding the parliamentary arithmetic, he provided the support of the official Opposition for this project, understanding and realising the important economic benefits that the proposal brings to the whole United Kingdom. That is to be underscored and welcomed at any time, but particularly in a post-Brexit environment.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is right. In the event that I am still Transport Secretary when the first train runs, I do not plan to emulate Mr Huskinson by standing on the track in front of the train as it arrives.

I am grateful for the cross-party support. I know that individual Members on both sides of the House have constituency problems or principled concerns about the project, but the fact is that the project was proposed by both parties back at the end of the last decade. It was first put on the table by the last Labour Government and has commanded cross-party support. I hope that will continue because both parties understand the benefits the project can bring to the whole country. I hope we can work together to ensure that we deliver this Bill, the next one and the whole project. I am grateful to the shadow Secretary of State for the support he has given to it.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): The Secretary of State has indicated that the project will generate jobs throughout the region, 60% of which will be in small

and medium-sized enterprises. What practical measures are being given to small contractors in other regions—I am being a bit parochial—such as Northern Ireland? What opportunities could exist for them in such a project?

Chris Grayling: I have been very clear to HS2 and to our contractors that I expect them to work with small and emerging British companies, to develop apprenticeship programmes and to do the right thing by all our futures. That is an essential part of the project, which is an investment not just in our infrastructure but in our skills base. That skills base resides not just within the apprentices who will be working on the project, but in the small businesses that supply it. I want those small businesses to come from every part of the United Kingdom.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): The Secretary of State has talked a great deal about my great city of Stoke-on-Trent, but he said in his statement that the service pattern “could” support an HS2 service to my city. Can he guarantee that we will retain our two fast trains to London per hour, as well as any potential classic-compatible trains?

Chris Grayling: Let me be very clear—indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) has already been lobbying me hard on this—that Stoke-on-Trent will be served by HS2 services and will see additional services connecting to other parts of the region as a result of the development. I see the future of the train service in Stoke-on-Trent as very bright. People in that great city will have access to more services as a result of the investment.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): In Chesterfield, we stand ready to take advantage of the opportunity created by the jobs at the new Staveley depot, which we welcome. We also very much welcome the suggestion that there will be a stop at Chesterfield. Will the Secretary of State build on the good news for us in Chesterfield by confirming that there will be stops at Chesterfield? The wording of the Bill is somewhat ambiguous. Will the project also necessitate the electrification of the midland main line south of Sheffield to Chesterfield and beyond?

Chris Grayling: I can confirm that Chesterfield will have a service on HS2. I can also confirm that the HS2 route through Chesterfield and Sheffield to Leeds will have to be electrified so those trains can run through to Leeds. I also think that when Northern Powerhouse Rail is developed, the route north of Sheffield will become a very important part of it.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): At a line-of-route briefing last week with MPs from Yorkshire and the midlands and me, I was dismayed to see that the HS2 chief executive officer, Sir David Higgins, roundly dismissed all the genuine concerns about lack of engagement and the failure of project staff to empathise with residents. In fact, when I raised the issue of Wells House Road in my constituency, he said it should have been bulldozed at the start. I have heard what the Secretary of State has said to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) and others, so could he urgently step in and act as Relate, if necessary, to help repair what looks like a complete breakdown in relations between my constituents and HS2?

Chris Grayling: I cannot comment on the original individual conversations. I simply repeat the point I made earlier that my door and the Minister’s door will be open to any Member from any part of this House who is concerned that their constituents are not being treated properly as part of this project.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I welcome the focus of the statement on the Crewe hub and its importance to the wider area of Cheshire and the north-west, but may I press the Secretary of State on some details? In the statement, he talks about the importance of HS2 to the whole country, but he also talks about the Crewe hub requiring national and local government to work together, which suggests that we in Cheshire will have to make a contribution that other parts of the country will not. Since this is such an important part of the economic development plans of Cheshire, the wider north-west and the cross-border area, will he confirm that he will not be asking local authorities to contribute, because of the benefit the hub will bring to my area?

Chris Grayling: The Crewe station site has the potential to be much more than just a station. There is a big regeneration opportunity for Crewe around that site, and it goes far beyond the provision of rail access. Inevitably, that needs to be something we work with the local community and local authorities on. I am very excited about the potential for Crewe station: if we look at the redundant land, particularly to the west, we see huge capacity for a massive and really important redevelopment project for the whole town of Crewe.

Mr Paul J. Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will know that, in May 2015, HS2 Ltd decided that there was no credible business case for extending a dedicated high-speed rail link north of Manchester to Glasgow. Given the announcement today, will he consider the merits of extending a dedicated high-speed rail link to Glasgow, given that a classic-compatible train without tilting capability will actually increase journey times between Manchester and Glasgow? That is unacceptable.

Chris Grayling: As I said earlier, our goal is to work to deliver that three-hour journey time we talked about, and that has the effect of bringing high-speed rail to Scotland. We have to use taxpayers’ money wisely, and we have to find the right balance in this project, but I want this project to work for Scotland as well, and I will do everything I can to make sure that happens.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that local authorities in north Wales have been very supportive of HS2, but please can he assure my constituents that there will be good train links between the Crewe hub and the Wrexham area, because that is very important for us all?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely expect that to be the case. Of course, the benefit of taking the current express trains off the main line is that it provides the opportunity for better services from north Wales to other parts of the country, so those services in north Wales are one of the potential real beneficiaries of this.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): May I start by saying to the Minister—*[Interruption.]* I have not even got there yet. The Minister may feel the need to hand out party political trinkets to the new hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton), who is not in his place. In doing so, he does not cause a problem for me or my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), but he undermines the good work done by Sara Williams and the Staffordshire chamber of commerce, who have been lobbying on this matter for a number of years—long before any of us were elected to this place, and that belittles the Minister in this place this evening.

The Secretary of State has said that there “could be” support for having HS2 in Stoke-on-Trent. That is not a commitment that my constituents can base any real decisions on. Could he confirm that, as was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North, the number of fast trains running from Stoke-on-Trent to London—London, and not another part of the region—will not be diminished by this announcement? Could he also confirm that capacity for freight transport on the west coast main line will not be diminished through making space for classic-compatible trains? As the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) asked, could the Secretary of State make it clear that the pain that Staffordshire feels will have economic gains, because without that he will struggle to get our support in the vote?

Chris Grayling: I met my hon. Friend the new Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) today to talk about the need to make sure that there is an HS2 service for Stoke-on-Trent, and I have given him that commitment. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members may chunter, but I remind them that my hon. Friend has been the transport spokesman for the ruling group on Stoke-on-Trent City Council, so he is eminently well qualified to make this case, and is already doing a first-rate job as representative of the Stoke-on-Trent South constituency. I have been pleased to give him a commitment about the services for Stoke. I am also pleased to give the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) a commitment that the whole point about HS2 is that it frees up capacity for these extra freight services and extra local passenger services. That is one of the reasons we are doing it.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for confirming in his response to my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) that the midland main line will be electrified, but we have been waiting for as long as I can remember for that to happen, and led up the garden path on numerous occasions. Will he therefore, for the record, give us a date when the midland main line south of Sheffield through into London will be electrified?

Chris Grayling: We are talking about the ability to run an electric train from London, up HS2, around the route into Sheffield Midland, and back up to Leeds. I have given a very clear commitment that that will be the case. As I have said in this House before, the next stage of electrification of the midland main line is currently under way. I have also said that my big priority is to deliver for the people on that line the service improvements they want as quickly as possible, and that is what I am seeking to do.

Acid Attacks

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

11.22 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing this, as it turns out, extremely timely debate to discuss our response to the rapid rise in the number of acid attacks. I am pleased to see the Minister in her place.

Last month in Newham, Jameel Mukhtar and his cousin Resham Khan, a student, were attacked with a corrosive liquid while sitting in a car on the way to marking her 21st birthday. They were left with severe burns, and injuries described by the Metropolitan police as life-changing. A 24-year-old suspect has been charged. There was a wave of revulsion across our borough after that attack, with many residents, particularly women, questioning whether it was safe any longer for them to walk down the street. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), who is in her place, attended a vigil for the victims organised by Stand Up To Racism, along with the mayor of Newham, attended by more than 200 people. There was strong support for Government action to tackle the rise of acid violence. A petition calling for a licensing scheme for acid sales has attracted more than 360,000 signatures.

I want to press the Minister for two specific changes to the law: first, that carrying acid should be an offence in exactly the same way as carrying a knife is an offence; and secondly, that there should be a requirement to have a licence to purchase sulphuric acid.

I warmly welcome the Home Secretary’s announcement yesterday of a review of the law and criminal justice response to acid attacks. I am pleased that she has undertaken to review the sentencing guidelines, as I called for last week.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for securing this debate, which comes at an extremely appropriate time. My constituent, Adele Bellis, was the subject of a horrific acid attack. She has shown tremendous strength and courage in the way she has rebuilt her life. In Adele’s view, clearer and tougher sentencing guidelines are needed. It must never be forgotten that those who are victims of acid attacks carry a life sentence. Does he agree that it is right that the issue of sentencing is included in the Government’s review?

Stephen Timms: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman and his constituent. Katie Piper, an acid attack survivor and founder of the Katie Piper Foundation, which supports victims, has said:

“Tougher sentencing would surely act as a deterrent to further attacks”;

and I agree with her. We need greater consistency in sentencing as well.

I hope that the review announced by the Home Secretary will be carried out quickly, because we need urgent action, and I hope that in her response to the debate, the Minister will be able to tell us about the envisaged timescale.

I want to say a little more about the two specific points that I raised earlier. First, carrying acid without good reason should be a criminal offence, as carrying a knife is already. Of course, there are wholly legitimate reasons for obtaining acid, as there are for obtaining a knife, but we do not want people carrying them around the streets.

The Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 has created a minimum custodial sentence for those aged 16 and over convicted of a second or subsequent offence of possession of a knife or offensive weapon. The sentence for an offender aged 18 or above is at least six months imprisonment when convicted, and that for 16 and 17 year olds is a detention order of at least four months. Comparable sentences for possession of acid could combat the apparently growing idea that it is a safe weapon for gang members and others wanting to commit violent crimes.

Secondly, a licence should be required for the purchase of sulphuric acid. Some have complained that that would be an excessive, knee-jerk response, but actually it has been proposed by the British Retail Consortium, whose members have agreed voluntarily to stop selling sulphuric acid products. It points out that, under the Control of Poisons and Explosive Precursor Regulations 2015—which amended the Poisons Act 1972 and were intended to restrict supply of items that could be used to cause an explosion—sulphuric acid is already covered but under the lesser “reportable substance” category. Its proposal is that sulphuric acid should be promoted to the “regulated substance” category so that a licence would be required to purchase it. Regulated substances require an explosives precursors and poisons licence. A member of the public needs to show a valid licence and associated photo identification before making a purchase.

The proposal is supported not only by members of the British Retail Consortium, but by the Association of Convenience Stores, which says:

“We support legislative action under the Explosive Precursors Regulations 2014; for example, reclassifying sulphuric acid from Reportable Substance to Regulated Substance. This will provide retailers clarity and certainty on their obligations for products which contain sulphuric acid.”

It is significant that the shopkeepers themselves are asking for that chance.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): The whole country has rightly been shocked by the recent acid attacks in London and the increased number of such attacks throughout the country. Many constituents have contacted me because they are horrified by what has been happening and feel that action needs to be taken. It is also important that we acknowledge the bravery of Resham Khan and her cousin, Jameel Mukhtar, in coming forward and sharing their experience so that we can discuss it here. I hope that the Minister will listen to both of my right hon. Friend’s suggestions, which I fully support.

Stephen Timms: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and agree with him on both points. I particularly endorse his point about the revulsion and wave of anxiety created by this spate of attacks. As well as shop sales, the issue of online sales will need to be addressed, including of substances other than sulphuric acid.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right: we need to control online sales, because if substances cannot be bought at the corner

shop sales will move online. Does he agree that, despite the practical difficulties in extending regulations to the online sphere, it is no less important that we tackle that if we are to restrict the supply of corrosive chemicals to illegitimate users?

Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is clear that part of the problem is online, and it will increasingly be so. That does need to be addressed as part of this initiative.

I have one other request for an outcome to the review that the Home Secretary has announced. In March, I asked a written question about the number of acid attacks in each of the last five years, and I was dismayed to receive this reply from the Minister’s predecessor:

“The Home Office does not collect data on the number of acid attacks.”

Since then, through freedom of information requests, a good deal of data have been published. I hope that the Minister will be able to assure us that in future, given the increasing concern about the matter, her Department will collect and publish data on acid attacks.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I sought the right hon. Gentleman’s permission to intervene. He has clearly outlined the acid attacks that take place in the United Kingdom. He and I are both members of the all-party group on international freedom of religion or belief, and he will know about the acid attacks perpetrated against people across the world. Is tonight an opportunity to raise awareness of acid attacks on persecuted Christians in Iran, where human rights and equality issues for women are also a concern? I know he has an interest in that issue.

Stephen Timms: The hon. Gentleman has found the opportunity and raised precisely that issue. He is absolutely right: the use of acid, in all sorts of ways, is quite widespread around the world. As far as I can tell, the incidents that we are increasingly seeing in the UK are not like those to which he refers in Iran or elsewhere in the world. It appears that gangs in the UK have decided that acid offers a less risky way of committing their violent crimes than other weapons. Of course, it is entirely appropriate for him to draw attention to this horrific problem elsewhere in the world.

Acid attacks are an abhorrent form of violence. Acid, or a similarly corrosive substance, is thrown on to the victim’s body—usually their face—in order permanently to disfigure, to maim or sometimes to blind them. Acid causes the skin and flesh to melt, often exposing and dissolving even the bones below. I pay tribute to James Berry, the former Member for Kingston and Surbiton, who talked a good deal about this. He made the point, rightly:

“For the victim, an acid attack is far worse than the life sentence the perpetrator plainly deserves.”

There has been a very worrying increase in acid violence. Last year, there were 451 such crimes in London, up from 261 in the previous year. In 2016, almost a third of them, I am sad to say, were carried out in the borough of Newham, which my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham and I represent. Since 2010 there have been almost 450 acid attacks in the borough. Constituents have suggested to me that there may well have been others that have not been reported, and so are not included in those statistics.

[Stephen Timms]

I have referred to the worry that many feel since the attack on the cousins in Newham. One resident said:

“I live in Newham and residents in the borough are feeling really unsecure and unsafe. My family and kids are so scared that they think twice before going out.”

Another wrote in an email:

“Having lived in Newham for 25 years I find myself considering whether I should move out of the area to ensure safety for my family.”

Metropolitan police statistics show only two attacks in the last year, and they are classified as hate crimes. There was the one on the cousins and another one somewhere else. The much greater worry, contrary to what some people think, is that acid is becoming a preferred weapon of gangs carrying out robberies. It is easy to obtain, cheap and hard to trace back to the perpetrator. While it is relatively hard to obtain a gun and knives are more tightly restricted, criminals seem to have concluded that acid is a less risky weapon when committing violent crimes. What we need to do, as I am sure the Minister will agree, is make acid more risky than it has been seen to be over the past two or three years.

I hope that the review will also look at how to equip the first responders to the victims of acid attacks. A number of people have contacted me ahead of this debate to pass on advice about how to treat victims most effectively at the scene of an attack and how to equip paramedics and first aiders who go to their aid.

A report compiled in 2014 by J. Sagar Associates of India for Acid Survivors Trust International points to what it sees as two main flaws in the UK’s approach to acid violence. The first is that weak restrictions on sales of acid are failing to prevent its acquisition for criminal use. The second is the inconsistent approaches taken by the courts in considering mitigating factors when sentencing those found guilty of acid attacks. Jaf Shah, executive director of Acid Survivors Trust International, advocates an age restriction of 18 on purchases and the prevention of cash sales to aid tracking, so that sales can be made only with a credit card. He suggests research to establish whether substances could be made less concentrated, more viscous or possibly even crystalline so that they are less easy to use to cause harm.

Licensing and restrictions have the support of very many of my constituents and of the local authority. Newham Council has backed tougher licensing conditions and robust codes of practice on the sale of noxious substances, as well as measures to raise awareness of the issue among those who work with young people.

To conclude, I welcome the Home Secretary’s announcement over the weekend of a review. I hope that the Minister is able to tell us something about the timescale for completing that work. I urge on her as outcomes of the review those two specific changes to the law: first, that carrying acid should be an offence, just as carrying a knife is; and, secondly, that there should be a requirement on those who purchase sulphuric acid to have a licence permitting them to do so. I look forward to the Minister’s response.

11.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton): I genuinely thank the hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) for

bringing this very important debate before the House today. How timely it is. I also thank colleagues who have made important contributions this evening. I thank the hon. Gentleman for the tone he set for us this evening. I agree with every point he made.

Even before the terrible events of last Thursday, which left five people injured, one with life-changing injuries, it was clear that the use of acids and other corrosives to attack people is a growing threat that must be addressed with urgency. Violence of any kind is unacceptable, but I think there is something particularly troubling about these kinds of attack. Corrosive substances cause severe burns and serious tissue damage. All too frequently, victims’ lives are altered forever. Nobody should have to go through this kind of mental and physical trauma. We have heard from victims who say that the injuries have deeply affected their sense of self. The challenge of returning to a normal life can sometimes feel almost insurmountable.

Sadly, these disturbing acts of violence are not new. The use of acids goes back centuries. However, the increase in incidents in this country is undoubtedly very worrying. In April, there was the attack in a Hackney nightclub, which left a number of people with severe burns and serious eye injuries, and we have heard the hon. Gentleman speak so eloquently and movingly this evening about the two cousins who were attacked in his constituency. It is vital that we do all we can to prevent these horrendous attacks from happening. We must not let those behind such attacks spread fear through society.

The law in this area is already strong, with acid attackers facing up to a life sentence in prison in certain cases. Meanwhile, suspicious transactions involving sulphuric acid must be reported to the police. However, it is vital to ensure that we are doing everything possible to tackle this emerging threat. Earlier this month, the Home Office held a joint event with the National Police Chiefs Council, which I attended. The meeting brought together law enforcement, Government, retailers, the NHS, experts and local policing to discuss the acid attacks and build up a better evidence picture. The hon. Gentleman made the important point that we must have better data on the scale of the threat to help us to understand how we will tackle it. Last October, with the help of the National Police Chiefs Council, we got more information from the police, which we have put into the public domain—it is on the Home Office website. We will be repeating that exercise, so that we collect data more regularly and have a much better understanding of the scale of the threat.

That meeting provided the basis for the action plan to tackle acid attacks that was announced by the Home Secretary on Sunday. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman—[*Interruption.*] I have been passed a useful note telling me that he has been made a right hon. Gentleman—it is richly deserved—so I apologise for not picking that up earlier. The action plan will include a wide-ranging review of the law enforcement and criminal justice response, existing legislation, access to harmful products and the support offered to victims. I want to reassure the right hon. Gentleman and all colleagues here tonight that the points he has raised are being actively considered as part of that review.

Lyn Brown: I genuinely thank the Minister for putting the review in motion. I welcome the breadth of the urgent issues that the Government have indicated will

be under consideration, but I wonder whether she thinks it is a good time for the review to take a broader look at the safety of the changes made to the sale of substances such as sulphuric acid by the Deregulation Act 2015. I understand that the experts who sat on the former Poisons Board, who had real expertise in this area, had serious concerns and favoured alternative reforms.

Sarah Newton: As I say, this is a wide-ranging review. We are definitely looking at the Poisons Act 1972, and I will make sure the hon. Lady's point is taken into careful consideration. We are looking at the Crown Prosecution Service's guidance to prosecutors, to ensure that acid and other corrosive substances can be classed as dangerous weapons. In addition, we will look again at the Poisons Act and whether more can be done to cover these harmful substances.

We will make sure that those who commit these terrible crimes feel the full force of the law. We will seek to ensure that everyone working in the criminal justice system, from police officers to prosecutors, has the powers they need severely to punish those who commit these appalling crimes. As the Home Secretary has said, life sentences must not be reserved for acid attack survivors. Further work will also take place with retailers, including online, to agree measures to restrict sales of acid and other corrosive substances. Victim support needs to be at the very heart of our response. We need to make sure that victims get the support they need, now and in the years ahead.

We are working on this with great urgency. We are about to go into recess, but I want to reassure the right hon. Member for East Ham that when Parliament gets back in September I will make sure that I update colleagues who are interested and seek an opportunity to update the House on the considerable progress that we expect to be able to make over the summer.

Stephen Timms *rose—*

Sarah Newton: I have probably got a few seconds left, so I want to reassure the right hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* I have obviously misjudged the amount of time I have, so I am happy to give way.

Stephen Timms: I am grateful to the Minister, and I look forward to the update in September, as, I am sure, do other Members. Is she able to tell us when she expects the review announced by the Home Secretary to conclude? When does she expect the final outcomes to be announced?

Sarah Newton: As I have said, we have already started work. We put a fair amount of it in motion last year during the build-up to last week's meeting. I cannot commit myself tonight to a particular time by which we will complete the work. As I think everyone will understand, it is so wide ranging that, while some elements will be relatively easy to bring to fruition, others will require a longer period. Some may require changes in legislation, in which case we will seek the earliest possible legislative opportunity. I can absolutely commit myself, however, to the seriousness with which we are taking this issue, and to the urgency, the vigour, and the resources that we are bringing to bear in the Home Office to co-ordinate a whole-system response. We are working with partners both outside and inside Parliament. Different agencies need to come together.

These are horrendous crimes, and I am very much aware of the fear that is spreading, not only in London but in other parts of the country. There is simply no place in 21st-century Britain for such hate-filled, utterly devastating attacks, and we will do absolutely everything we can to prevent them.

Question put and agreed to.

11.46 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 17 July 2017

CABINET OFFICE

Electoral Commission Report on May 2016 Polls: Government Response

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Skidmore): The Government are today publishing their responses to the Electoral Commission's reports on the administration of the Mayor of London and London Assembly elections and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections for 2016.

We have combined our response to the report on the London elections with the recommendations made in the reports of the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) where they are relevant to those polls.

Similarly, our response to the report on the PCC elections also incorporates relevant recommendations by the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the AEA. In addition, we have provided an annex of responses to additional AEA recommendations from their 2016 report that are not relevant to these polls.

Where recommendations by the Electoral Commission in its two reports are identical, they have been addressed in our response to the PCC election.

We are grateful for the recommendations produced by all these organisations and thank them for their work. These reports aid the Government in monitoring the effectiveness of electoral legislation; and help us to make improvements and identify future policy challenges and possible resolutions.

The Government will continue to work with these organisations, as well as electoral administrators and other partners, to improve our electoral system and ensure the effective running of elections. We will take these recommendations into account in implementing the recommendations of Sir Eric Pickles' review of electoral fraud published last year.

Copies of these Government responses will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS50]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Digital Economy Act Commencement

The Minister for Digital (Matt Hancock): In April this year, Her Majesty the Queen gave Royal Assent to the Digital Economy Act 2017. The Act introduced measures to help consumers access broadband, build digital infrastructure, protect children from online pornography and enable better public services using digital technologies.

A number of important provisions in the Act have already come into force. These include powers on broadband USO, switching, automatic compensation and information powers to help consumers accessing electronic communications services, protection for citizens from nuisance calls and others.

I can today inform the House that the Government have made the first commencement regulations to bring into force a considerable number of other sections of the Act.

We have taken steps to implement the new age verification requirement for online pornography as part of our continuing work to make the internet safer. The new scheme is complex and will not be fully in place until April 2018, but today we are bringing into force powers to designate the regulator and powers to allow guidance to be issued.

We are also bringing into force measures to improve digital connectivity across the UK, starting the implementation of the new electronic communications code to assist operators to develop new infrastructure, putting in place planning reforms and giving powers to allow Ofcom to make better use of radio spectrum to improve mobile connectivity.

We have also started the process of implementing the measures in the Act that allow the Government to make better use of data. Powers to allow HMRC to share non-identifying information in the public interest will come into force and help deliver more effective and efficient public services. We will also bring into force the information sharing arrangement with the Employers' Liability Tracing Office to help those who have suffered personal injury as a result of employment to trace liability insurance policies. New provisions to enable public authorities to share information with the UK Statistics Authority will also commence.

Finally, to help consumers better manage their bills, we will commence powers to require mobile operators to offer bill limits to all their customers. To allow operators time to adapt their systems and processes, I am today announcing that the requirement will come into force from October 2018.

Commencing these provisions marks another significant milestone towards implementing the Digital Economy Act 2017 and delivering our digital strategy.

[HCWS51]

NORTHERN IRELAND

National Security Arrangements: Northern Ireland

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (James Brokenshire): This is a summary of the main findings from the report by His Honour Brian Barker QC, the Independent Reviewer of National Security Arrangements in Northern Ireland, covering the period from June 2016 to 31 December 2016. His Honour Brian Barker concludes:

"I was appointed by the Secretary of State in May 2016. I have spent time obtaining an overview of institutions, personalities and problems. I have been fully briefed on the security situation. I received presentations from MI5 on the practical effect of co-operation and exchange of intelligence. My visits to various PSNI establishments and to MI5 left an impression of deep commitment and professionalism. Strong cross-border links continue with An Garda Síochána, resulting in effective co-operation and impressive disruption.

The aim of a more stable society, where the effect of local terrorism has a decreasing impact, seemed to have made some progress through 2016 despite a picture of continuing terrorist threat. It is clear, however, that police and prison officers face high risks both on and off duty. The context in which national security activities are performed have been described in the past as challenging, and continue to be so.

In preparing this report I have considered the current threat level, and what I have learned of events of a terrorist nature during the year. The number of shooting incidents related to the security situation for the 12 month period was 49, almost identical to that in 2015, while the number of bombing incidents, 27, was exactly half that recorded in 2015. There were six security/paramilitary related deaths in the period to December 31 2016. This was three times the number of the previous year.

The overall threat is real and enduring and broadly unchanged despite each recognisable group being somewhat disrupted and there being some relaxation of attitude in some communities. The exchange of intelligence and the evident co-operation between authorities continues to make inroads. As in recent years there have been successes and considerable effort devoted to containing and disrupting dissident groups. Nevertheless, planning and targeting continues and attacks occur. The threat from those released from custodial sentences and those given bail continue to present a challenge.

Dissident republican groupings remain interested and involved in criminality, organised crime, and money laundering. They express political purpose, either with conviction or because it is necessary so as to obscure criminality. Loyalist paramilitaries claim political allegiance, although the motivation of many is crime and control through intimidation and violence.

Throughout 2016 I met a range of stakeholders. Representatives of the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB), the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (PONI) and the Committee on Administration of Justice (CAJ) raised concerns about the use, control and reporting of covert human intelligence sources (“CHIS”) and whether, for example, any CHIS were working without PSNI knowledge. This area that has been reviewed in the past and I will review it in the coming year in light of the new Investigatory Powers Act 2016.

My meeting with the NIPB’s Independent Human Rights Advisor, Alyson Kilpatrick, fortified my predecessor’s high regard for her, and the important role she plays.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Barra McGrory QC, briefed me on some operational problems inherent in the prosecution of alleged terrorists. The deficiencies in the administration of criminal justice and the limited progress in case management are all too obvious. Applications for disclosure in major terrorism trials and the need for appropriate balance, continue to present problems. Tightening the criminal justice system by streamlining criminal justice processes and faster committal proceedings would increase public confidence.

A topic raised by several politicians was the extent of the activities, as well as the remit, of the National Crime Agency (NCA). The NCA’s Head of Investigations informed me NCA officers in Northern Ireland can only exercise constabulary powers or undertake covert investigatory activity with the agreement of the Chief Constable. The PSNI are sighted on all operational

activity. The NCA has no national security function, but is concerned with serious crime, for example child exploitation and drug smuggling, including crime carried out by paramilitary groups. In this regard it has a good working relationship with MI5. I am satisfied these statutory provisions are adhered to.

Progress on “the past” is still at an early stage while expectations for the proper and balanced understanding of the history in relation to the legacy inquests remain high. Funding is a continuing issue.

The Assistant Chief Constable responsible for policing the marching season reported an overall sense of reduced tension compared to the previous year and the 12 July parades passed off without serious incident. I was encouraged by the dismantling in early October of the Twaddell Avenue protest camp, which had been established and ongoing since 2013.

I was impressed by the standards and commitment of senior members of MI5 and the PSNI who provided unstinting time and access. My thanks are also due to the NIO for its support.

I have measured performance in 2016 against the five key principles identified in relation to national security in Annex E to the St Andrews Agreement of October 2006. My conclusions in relation to Annex E can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statements/Commons/2017-07-17/HCWS54/>.”

[HCWS54]

TRANSPORT

HS2 Update

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):

I would like to update the House on the progress of High Speed Two.

Phase One of the railway—from London to West Midlands—is progressing well. In February, Parliament granted powers to construct the route from London to Birmingham, including new stations at London Euston, Old Oak Common, Birmingham Curzon Street and Birmingham Interchange, near Solihull. As a result, enabling works on the route, contracts for which were awarded last November, have now started.

In March last year, the tender shortlist for Phase One of the main civil engineering works contracts, comprising bridges, tunnels, embankments and viaducts, was released. These are the biggest HS2 contracts to date. In a clear signal of how work is progressing, this morning I am pleased to announce the decision to award Stage 1 of these contracts, comprising design and construction preparation works, to the joint ventures set out below. Contracts are expected to be signed after completion of the mandatory standstill period. The joint ventures are as follows:

Area South

S1—Euston Tunnels and Approaches—SCS JV (Skanska Construction UK Limited, Costain Limited, STRABAG AG)

S2—Northolt Tunnels—SCS JV (Skanska Construction UK Limited, Costain Limited, STRABAG AG)

Area Central

C1—Chiltern Tunnels and Colne Valley Viaduct—Align JV (Bouygues Travaux Publics, VolkerFitzpatrick, Sir Robert McAlpine)

C2—North Portal Chiltern Tunnels to Brackley—CEK JV (Carillion Construction Limited, Eiffage Genie Civil SA, Kier Infrastructure and Overseas Limited)

C3—Brackley to South Portal of Long Itchington Wood Green Tunnel—CEK JV (Carillion Construction Limited, Eiffage Genie Civil SA, Kier Infrastructure and Overseas Limited)

Area North

N1—Long Itchington Wood Green Tunnel to Delta Junction and Birmingham Spur—BBV JV (Balfour Beatty Group Ltd, VINCI Construction Grands Projets, VINCI Construction UK Ltd, VINCI Construction Terrassement)

N2—Delta Junction to WCML Tie-In - BBV JV (Balfour Beatty Group Ltd, VINCI Construction Grands Projets, VINCI Construction UK Ltd, VINCI Construction Terrassement)

The expected total value of these contracts including both Stage 1 and Stage 2 (the full construction phase) is currently estimated to be worth around £6.6 billion. Stage 2 will commence in 2019 and, along with Stage 1, is expected to support 16,000 jobs across the country. In addition, they are expected to generate 7,000 contract opportunities in the supply chain, of which around 60% are expected to go to SMEs.

HS2 stations at Euston, Old Oak Common and in Birmingham will be central to HS2 and the work needed to develop designs is also well underway. Last week, both the Invitations to Tender (ITTs) for the station design services contracts for all four Phase 1 stations and the Invitation to Participate in Dialogue (ITPD) for a Euston master development partner were released to shortlisted bidders. These are significant milestones. They show how progress is continuing at pace in order to deliver stations that will be embraced by the local communities, drive economic growth and provide seamless journeys for passengers.

We are also making good progress on the rest of the route. Later today, I will be introducing a Bill to Parliament seeking the necessary powers to construct Phase 2a of HS2, from West Midlands to Crewe. Phase 2a will bring HS2 within reach of all the cities in the North that have existing rail connections to Crewe. I will also be updating the House on other developments along the Phase 2 route including decisions on the 2b route from Crewe to Manchester and West Midlands to Leeds.

The progress we are making with HS2 is clear evidence that the Government are delivering on their commitments and are getting on with building the infrastructure needed to build a stronger, fairer, more prosperous Britain.

[HCWS49]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council: 17 July 2017

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 17 July. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. The meeting will be held in Brussels.

Foreign Affairs Council

The agenda for the July Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) is expected to include the EU global strategy, Libya and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

EU global strategy

EU Foreign Ministers will discuss the second year priorities for the European global strategy. The UK remains committed to European security and will engage constructively in these discussions, including ensuring complementarity with NATO.

Libya

The appointment of a new UN Special Representative of the Security General (SRSG) makes it a timely moment for a stocktake on Libya. Discussion will focus on the latest developments in the Libya political process. The UK aims to build support for the Libyan political solution based on amending the Libyan political agreement to be more inclusive, and to create momentum around the appointment of the new SRSG Ghassan Salame.

DPRK

Discussions will cover the importance of a united international response to the launch of an inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) by the DPRK on 4 July. We expect this will focus on the need for the EU to use its collective weight to pressure China to exert further their unique influence on DPRK. The UK will use the discussion to make clear the EU has an important role to play on this issue through increased sanctions on the DPRK.

[HCWS52]

Foreign Affairs Council: 19 June 2017

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 19 June. The Foreign Affairs Council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. The meeting was held in Luxembourg.

Foreign Affairs Council

The meeting covered discussions on the EU global strategy, EU-NATO, counter-terrorism, migration, Iraq and the Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting.

EU global strategy

The Council had a discussion on the implementation on the EU global strategy. Foreign Ministers welcomed the report and highlighted the important work achieved over the year.

EU-NATO co-operation

Foreign Ministers discussed EU-NATO co-operation with NATO Deputy Secretary-General Rose Gottemoeller. The discussion was based on a joint progress report by the EU High Representative and the Secretary General of NATO. The Council adopted conclusions on the report, welcoming progress in the implementation of the common set of proposals and calling for further steps in the same direction. Foreign Ministers agreed to support more work, including on counter-terrorism, cyber security, hybrid threats and strategic communications.

Counter-terrorism

The discussion began with condolences for the recent attacks in London, Manchester and Mali. Foreign Ministers debated the external aspects of counter-terrorism, a timely discussion in view of the recent attacks in the EU and beyond. They underlined that counter-terrorism is the highest security priority for the EU. The Council

adopted conclusions on counter-terrorism. The UK set out four areas to confront: risk of radicalisation in domestic communities; external conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Libya attracting foreign fighters; overseas financing of extremist groups; and online radicalisation.

Migration

Foreign Ministers discussed the external aspects of migration in preparation for the European Council of 22-23 June. They took stock of the progress made on the partnership framework. They discussed pressure on transit and origin countries, and the impact of EU efforts in the Mediterranean.

Iraq

The Council discussed Iraq, focusing on the latest developments, in particular in Mosul and Nineveh province, and on the future stabilisation of the country. The Council adopted conclusions.

Gulf crisis

Foreign Ministers discussed the current crisis in the Gulf region. They urged de-escalation of the crisis through dialogue and negotiation, and welcomed the mediation efforts of Kuwait. Ministers agreed on the importance of being seen to be impartial in the dispute. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs shared the UK's analysis on the situation in the Gulf.

Eastern Partnership ministerial

Ministers discussed anti-corruption, strategic communication, rule of law, and human rights reform in Eastern Partnership countries. They welcomed the progress made on all of these issues and stressed their continued importance.

Ministers agreed a number of measures without discussion:

The Council adopted conclusions on climate change following the United States Administration's decision to leave the Paris Agreement.

The Council adopted conclusions on a framework for a joint EU diplomatic response to malicious cyber activities ("cyber diplomacy toolbox").

The Council adopted conclusions on a renewed impetus for the Africa-EU partnership.

The Council adopted conclusions on Mali and the Sahel.

The Council adopted conclusions on the EU strategy for Central Asia.

The Council adopted conclusions welcoming the Court of Auditors' special report on "EU assistance to Tunisia".

The Council adopted conclusions on EU engagement with civil society.

The Council extended the restrictive measures in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by Russia until 23 June 2018.

The Council extended the restrictive measures on sanctions on Guinea-Bissau for a further 12 months.

Member states participating in the European Defence Agency (EDA) adopted a declaration reaffirming their commitment to strengthen European defence co-operation by improving security of supply.

The Council endorsed a Joint Declaration between the EU, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Spain, the UK and Vietnam on reinforced co-operation in the field of sustainable energy.

[HCWS53]

Petition

Monday 17 July 2017

OBSERVATIONS

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Persecution of Christians

The petition of parishioners of the Parish of Saint John Southworth, Nelson, Brierfield and Fence, Lancashire,

Declares that the petitioners believe that attacks on Christians in 20% of the world's countries since 2014 is concerning and that more should be done to combat religious persecution.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take further action to prevent and raise awareness of attacks on Christians, worldwide.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Andrew Stephenson, Official Report, 30 March 2017; Vol. 624, c. 511.]

[P002032]

The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Lord Ahmad) made the following observations:

The persecution of individuals based on their religion or belief remains of profound concern to the United Kingdom. The freedom to practise, change or share one's faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a fundamental human right, and the UK Government are committed to defending this human right and promoting respect and tolerance between religious communities.

The Foreign Office's work on Freedom of Religion or Belief

At country level, we lobby Governments for changes in laws and practices that discriminate against individuals on the basis of their religion or belief, and we continue to raise cases of persecution in individual countries. For example, Ministers and British diplomats recently raised religious freedom in Russia, following the Russian Supreme Court's decision to uphold a ruling that recognises Jehovah's Witnesses as 'extremists'. In Sudan, we have

lobbied consistently on behalf of four imprisoned Christian pastors, who have now been released, partly due to our efforts. During his visit to Pakistan in November, the Foreign Secretary raised the rights of all Pakistani citizens, including religious minorities.

We are deeply concerned about persecution of religious minorities in the middle east, where we have seen appalling crimes committed against Christians, Madeans, Yazidis and other minorities, as well as the majority Muslim populations in Iraq and Syria. The UK is determined to seek justice for all the victims who have suffered as a result of crimes committed by Daesh around the world. At the 71st United Nations General Assembly in September 2016, together with the Government of Iraq and other international partners, the Foreign Secretary launched the campaign to bring Daesh to Justice. On the humanitarian track, Britain has pledged more than £2.3 billion to support those affected by the conflict in Syria, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. In Iraq, we are working with the authorities in Ninewa to ensure that protection of minorities is properly addressed in their strategic vision for the region.

The UK works to promote Freedom of Religion or Belief at the United Nations. We are committed to promoting implementation of key resolutions, including Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, which focuses the international community on combating religious intolerance, protecting the human rights of minorities and promoting pluralism in society.

Our programme funds support our strategic aim to promote and protect Freedom of Religion or Belief globally. Under the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, we are funding a project to develop lesson plans for secondary school teachers in the middle east and North Africa region to enable them to teach children about the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief. We are also continuing to support a network of human rights defenders in South Asia, and are beginning to build up a network of youth activists.

Freedom of Religion or Belief is a priority for the Prime Minister, who reiterated in her Easter message her conviction that we must "do more to stand up for the freedom of people of all religions to practice their beliefs openly and in peace and safety". In my new role as Minister for Human Rights, I am committed to working with my Ministerial counterparts and our diplomatic network to move this agenda forward through lobbying and practical action on the ground.

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