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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 22 March 2018

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Speaker: Colleagues, we shall now observe a one-minute silence in respectful memory of those who died a year ago today.

The House observed a one-minute silence.

Oral Answers to Questions

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport was asked—

Communications Act 2003: Public Service Broadcasters

1. **John Grogan** (Keighley) (Lab): Whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of extending the provisions of the Communications Act 2003 to give greater prominence to public service broadcasters; and if he will make a statement. [904521]

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Hancock): Before I answer the question, let me say that I am sure the whole House will want not only to mark the memory of those who passed away a year ago, as we have just done in the one-minute silence, but to thank once more the emergency services who keep us safe, and—especially on this day—those who put others' safety ahead of their own. We remember those who have lost their lives defending democracy. They will not be forgotten.

We warmly welcome the high-quality programming of our public service broadcasters. It is important for public service broadcasting content to be widely accessible to UK audiences, and we strengthened provision for that in the Digital Economy Act 2017.

John Grogan: As one who somewhat unexpectedly returned to the House last June, I too want to thank all those who protect us on a daily basis to enable us to do our own job of giving voice to our constituents in the Chamber.

Does the Minister agree that Parliament needs to give updated powers to Ofcom so that it can ensure that public service content, such as “Newsround” on CBBC, is easier to find than, say, cartoon networks on the ever-increasing number of platforms that are available?

Matt Hancock: The rules require the provision of a programming guide to ensure that public service broadcasting is prominent in linear programming. Content

is increasingly consumed not in a linear way in a programme, but across the internet and on smart TVs. We have required Ofcom to revise its code by 1 December 2020, and to report before then on how we can ensure that that prominence can work effectively in the digital age.

Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I raised the issue of the electronic programming guide with the right hon. Gentleman during the Committee stage of the Digital Economy Bill. It is vital for the guide to have prominence. Amazon, Netflix and all the other platforms have no electronic programming guides, and even Sky has reduced its guide. Although I raised the matter, the Government have done nothing. They are doing very little to protect public service broadcasters. When will the right hon. Gentleman and the Government act?

Matt Hancock: As I have said, we have already acted in the Digital Economy Act. The hon. Gentleman served on the Bill Committee—with great distinction, I might add. I made it clear during the debates on the Bill that if Ofcom's report makes it clear there is a problem, and one that can only be fixed by legislation, we will introduce that legislation.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Creating equality for indigenous language programming takes political will. What will the Secretary of State do personally to bring about parity in funding and original broadcasting output for languages such as Scottish Gaelic and Welsh?

Matt Hancock: We are strong supporters of the other indigenous languages of the UK. We have strongly supported the Welsh-language channel S4C. However, I am keen to see what more we can do to support the Gaelic language, and I look forward to meeting the hon. Lady's colleagues to discuss how we can make that work.

Mr Speaker: I know that—exceptionally—the shadow Secretary of State would like to echo the tributes articulated by the Secretary of State.

Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): You are very kind, Mr Speaker. I would like to associate myself and the Labour party with the Secretary of State's tributes, particularly to the very brave PC Keith Palmer, who gave his life protecting us in this place, and the five others who died in that terrible attack a year ago today.

Broadcasting of Sport: Terrestrial Channels

2. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the broadcasting of sport on terrestrial television channels. [904522]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): Sport is a key element of our national identity and the Government are committed to promoting sport and ensuring its coverage is made available to as many television viewers as possible. The listed events regime operates to make sure that sports events with a national significance can be viewed on free-to-air channels, and the Government are committed to safeguarding the regime.

Huw Merriman: This week it was an absolute privilege to host in Parliament Dame Katherine Grainger, our most decorated female Olympian and now head of UK Sport. She came with the BBC Sport team as we all launched its new platform that will allow more sports to feature on the BBC website, acting as that platform. Does the Minister agree that this is a way to inspire more people to take up more sport and become Olympians in the future?

Tracey Crouch: I very much agree and congratulate my hon. Friend on his interest in this area and on hosting the launch of the BBC initiative, which I welcome. It will stream over 1,000 hours of extra sport a year, and along with the BBC connected sport app, this scheme will widen access to sports fans across the country. Colleagues who have not yet seen the live guide on the BBC Sport app should definitely check it out.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): We rightly protect many major sporting events for terrestrial TV, including the forthcoming FA cup and the FIFA World cup. There is widespread concern across the House that the FIFA World cup will be exploited by Putin as a propaganda coup. What is the Minister doing with the FA, the BBC and FIFA to minimise the opportunities for it to be exploited in that way?

Tracey Crouch: It is understandable that any host nation of a major sporting event, of which the FIFA World cup in Russia is one, likes to announce the event with a fanfare. However, the Government are working closely with the Football Association to give it all the support it needs in terms of security for the team and also guidance to the fans so that they can go to and from the World cup safely.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Is enough women's sport broadcast on terrestrial TV, and if not, what can the Government do about it?

Tracey Crouch: There can never be enough women's sport broadcast on TV, and I would always encourage more women's sport to be on TV. May I take this opportunity to congratulate Manchester United football club, which has finally dragged itself into the 21st century and announced that it will have a women's football team?

Mr Speaker: They are light years behind Arsenal.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): While thinking of the victims of the terrorist outrage last year, all of us on these Benches hope that the families of those who were tragically killed have been looked after.

Can the sports Minister assure us that there will be coverage of the World cup, and will she give an honest answer to this question: does she believe that what the Foreign Secretary said to a Select Committee the other day is good advice?

Mr Speaker: Needless to say, all the Minister's answers are honest; whether they satisfy the palate of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) is uncertain, but they are all honest.

Tracey Crouch: First, of course PC Keith Palmer was an avid Charlton Athletic fan, and it was only right that the club respected him by turning his usual red seat at The Valley white with his number written on it, so his memory will always live on at the football club.

On the hon. Gentleman's second question, I might not have put it in those terms, Mr Speaker.

Tourism

3. **James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to support tourism throughout the UK. [904523]

5. **Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to support tourism throughout the UK. [904525]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Michael Ellis): This week is English Tourism Week, and more than 50 Members of Parliament are doing constituency days tomorrow. The Government's tourism action plan outlines the ways in which we support tourism, both domestic and international, throughout the UK, and VisitBritain works hard to promote Britain as both an international tourist destination and, of course, one for domestic visitors.

James Cartlidge: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. As this is English Tourism Week, may I draw his attention to the wool towns project in Suffolk, where five of our beautiful medieval wool towns—Sudbury, Hadleigh, Long Melford, Lavenham and Clare—are joining together to draw more tourists to the area? I send him a warm invitation to visit the wool towns and to meet the stakeholders who are working so hard to make this happen.

Michael Ellis: Yes indeed. I thank my colleague for his interest in this area, and I will always support my colleagues in their efforts to improve the visitor economy in their constituencies. I hope that we can indeed organise a visit to the wool towns. In the meantime, I advise him in the first instance to look into the Discover England fund, which is a great fund. Also, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has the Coastal Communities fund, and sources of funding for initiatives that support the local visitor economy.

Chris Davies: I thank the Minister for his answer, but this question is on tourism throughout the UK. Earlier this month at the Welsh tourism awards, the Brecon Beacons in my constituency was announced as the best tourist destination in Wales—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I knew that, and the Secretary of State knew that, and evidently many Members in this House knew that as well, but how can we tell the rest of the world about it so that they will come and visit?

Michael Ellis: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State knew that as well, and I certainly want to congratulate the Brecon Beacons national park on its award. We are working closely with our national parks, which are real jewels in our tourism crown, to ensure that visitors enjoy our beautiful countryside, and thanks to Members of Parliament such as my hon. Friend, that message is being well and truly transmitted.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on industrial heritage. Our history is of course about beautiful stately homes, but it is equally about the history of working people. What steps can we take to ensure that our industrial heritage gets its fair share of advertising space in our ports and airports, where it can be seen by tourists visiting the UK?

Michael Ellis: The Black Country Museum and other heritage sites are very important to our economy. The heritage aspects of this country are one of the principal reasons that people within the United Kingdom visit sites around our country, and we value them greatly. In fact, a recent report has indicated that UK hotels, including those around heritage sites, received some £5 billion of investment in expansions and openings last year. That is driven by record tourism figures, and it is thanks to our heritage sites that we can promote that tourism.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Will the Minister explain why lottery funding, which supports tourism, is so unequal? Since 1995, the Secretary of State's West Suffolk constituency has received more than £22 million, compared with just £13 million in Barnsley East.

Michael Ellis: It is arm's-length bodies that allocate that funding, and the reality is that 70% to 75% of all funding goes outside the London area. Of course we want to encourage as much funding throughout the United Kingdom as possible.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The merits of rural tourism are well understood by the Minister. May I also urge him to join up the dots and use the opportunities to promote rural tourism, and to offer those who visit rural areas a better understanding of food, agriculture and food production?

Michael Ellis: Yes, indeed. The Prime Minister herself acknowledges the wonderful aspects of our rural tourism through the walks that we know she enjoys. Our rural economy benefits hugely from tourism.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Great Grimsby is of course known for its fishing heritage, and it has the wonderful National Fishing Heritage Centre in its town centre, but our history goes far beyond that. Grimsby has its very own original seal from the signing of the town's charter in 1201. Will the Secretary of State and his Ministers assist me in promoting this important part of our history, perhaps starting with a display in this place?

Michael Ellis: Of course a document dating from 1201 is very much worth visiting, and we would encourage visits to the hon. Lady's constituency in order to do that. It is a matter for Parliament whether documents are hosted here, but we would certainly encourage as many people as possible to visit her constituency to see the wonderful things on offer.

Superfast Broadband

4. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of his Department's progress towards meeting the universal service obligation on superfast broadband coverage.

[904524]

The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Margot James): Superfast broadband is now available to 95% of UK premises, and roll-out will continue to extend coverage to as much of the remaining 5% as possible. By 2020, the universal service obligation will give everyone the legal right to high-speed broadband of at least 10 megabits per second.

John Howell: My constituency consists of some small rural villages that, despite being relatively close to London, do not have good internet access. What can be done to help them?

Margot James: The Government are taking a range of measures to help my hon. Friend's villages. The Better Broadband scheme is available right now to anyone who cannot access speeds above 2 megabits per second. In the longer term, our universal service obligation will give everyone a right to broadband speeds of 10 megabits per second or higher by 2020.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Despite the funding that has been poured into securing superfast broadband in Northern Ireland, many people in my constituency have been left literally feet away from having a connection installed. What has been done to ensure that rural broadband is actually rural and gets to the villages and rural communities?

Margot James: Once we have an Administration in Northern Ireland, there are many plans that we want to implement. We have changed the national planning policy framework and, working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, we have rural development programme funding. There is also the £67 million nationwide gigabit broadband voucher scheme, which is available to small and medium-sized enterprises and local communities.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Unlike the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), Wellingborough is largely urban. There is a modern housing estate in the middle of the town where 75 people do not have broadband, and there is a small part of a big industrial area that also does not have broadband. I am fed up with the Government's warm words, so when are they going to do something about Openreach and tell it to connect those people?

Margot James: I heartily endorse my hon. Friend's sentiments. The changes that we have made to the national planning policy framework propose that local authorities should now prioritise full-fibre connections to all existing and new developments.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Aberdeenshire is currently the only area in Scotland that has been chosen for the Department's pilot scheme to roll out 1 gigabit per second connections. Will the Minister consider extending that to East Lothian, which more accurately reflects the roll-out problems across both Scotland and the United Kingdom?

Margot James: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that we are developing the pilot into a national scheme, and the local full fibre networks programme

will have another wave of offers later in the summer. I congratulate the area of Scotland that managed to win in the first round.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Does the Minister agree that those in receipt of public funds to roll out broadband to our hardest-to-reach areas, such as Openreach, should use a combination of the best available technologies, including fixed wireless, to provide those solutions?

Margot James: I agree with my hon. Friend. In fact, the USO that we will introduce by 2020 will enable faster speeds to be delivered by both fixed line and wireless technologies.

Leaving the EU: Data Protection Agreements

6. **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the Data Protection Bill on data protection agreements with the EU after the UK leaves the EU. [904526]

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Hancock): The free flow of data is critical to both the EU and the UK, and it is at the core of any modern trading relationship. That is why we are committed to ensuring that we will keep data flows open after the UK leaves the EU.

Joanna Cherry: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer, but the immigration exemption in schedule 2 to the Bill is not reflective of the stated permissible exemptions under article 23 of the general data protection regulation. Why is the Secretary of State resisting amendment to the Bill when he must know that it could affect the grant of adequacy by the European Commission following our exit from the European Union?

Matt Hancock: On the contrary, the Data Protection Bill is entirely compliant with the GDPR. Indeed, it implements the GDPR in the UK.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I want to associate the Scottish National party with the Secretary of State's comments remembering those who died last year and thanking those who keep us safe on a daily basis.

In the Data Protection Bill Committee this week, fears of achieving adequacy were raised time and again, including around immigration exemptions, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) mentioned. Given what has just happened to the UK fishing industry, the "Trust us, it will be okay" approach has failed spectacularly. What cast-iron guarantees has the Secretary of State received from the European Commission that there is nothing in the Data Protection Bill that could jeopardise achieving adequacy?

Matt Hancock: We are entirely aligned on what we want to achieve, which is a Data Protection Bill entirely consistent with the GDPR, and that is what is before the House at the moment. Some amendments that have been tabled would make it more difficult for adequacy to be achieved, not least by introducing absolutist language on rights, as opposed to the nuanced language in the

Bill at the moment. I urge the whole House to support the Government in our aim of achieving adequacy with the EU.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): We will not get an adequacy agreement with the EU if we cannot keep data safe in this country. The Cambridge Analytica scandal shows how grave that threat has become. To get to the bottom of that threat, it is vital that we understand the network of companies associated with that malign octopus. Will the Secretary of State commit now to auditing and making public all Government contractors with links to Cambridge Analytica, some of whom, I understand, the Foreign Office is assembling for a secretive weekend somewhere in the countryside on Saturday?

Matt Hancock: An investigation, led by the Information Commissioner, was already under way before the recent scandal became public at the weekend. The Government have made it clear that there were contracts in the past with this group of companies, struck in 2008, for instance, and 2009 and 2014, but there are no ongoing arrangements—contractual arrangements—between the Government and Cambridge Analytica, or the Cambridge Analytica group.

Liam Byrne: There are many individuals and intellectual property agreements between Cambridge Analytica and other firms, and I hope that the Secretary of State will reflect on his answer and come forward with a more comprehensive approach. This episode has revealed that the Information Commissioner simply does not have the power to conduct investigations properly. It is ludicrous that it has taken her so long to get a search warrant for Cambridge Analytica offices, and it is ludicrous that people frustrating her investigations do not face jail for that frustration. Will the Secretary of State now commit to bringing forward extra powers for the Information Commissioner in the Data Protection Bill? If he does not, we will.

Matt Hancock: It is all very well the right hon. Gentleman's adopting an abrasive tone, but the truth is that the Data Protection Bill currently before Parliament is all about strengthening enforcement and strengthening people's right to consent. I did not intend to get partisan, but the powers that we were left by the Labour party are the powers that are being used at the moment, and I want those powers strengthened.

If, in the light of the evidence from this investigation, we need to further strengthen those powers, I am willing to consider that, but I am not willing to take a lecture from somebody who left the data protection powers in need of the update that we are driving through.

Music Provision in Schools

7. **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on changes to music provision in schools. [904527]

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Hancock): We strongly support the provision of music and arts in schools, and I firmly believe in the importance of investing in creative schools for the future.

I am meeting my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education next month to discuss music and arts in education.

Daniel Zeichner: Cambridgeshire Music hub does a great job for Cambridgeshire schools, but many still struggle—so much so that long-established local music shop Millers Music last year felt moved to donate 21 free pianos to local schools. More than 270 groups applied, leading Simon Pollard, the managing director, to say:

“This overwhelming response to the giveaway only served to highlight the lack of funding for music in the curriculum.”

It was a tremendous gesture, but are random acts of generosity really the way to sustain our creative industries in the future?

Matt Hancock: I welcome the generosity of that group and of many others, but the hon. Gentleman is right—it is not all down to local generosity, welcome as that must be. We have invested over £400 million in music provision through music education hubs, and we continue to invest at the rate of £75 million a year.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Owing to stingy cuts from Edinburgh, local authorities in my constituency have had to face cuts to music education. Is there anything that my right hon. Friend can do to provide support from Westminster to local authorities in Scotland, to protect the services that the SNP will not?

Matt Hancock: As my hon. Friend knows, we have protected per pupil funding in England, but of course education is devolved in Scotland. I do not know whether the Scottish Government have provided anything like the support that we have for music education hubs here in England. The money that we have put into music education hubs goes an awfully long way, and frankly it looks like the SNP Government need to do more.

Gender Pay Equality: Broadcasting

9. **Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the level of gender pay equality in the broadcasting sector. [904529]

The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Margot James): It is clear from recently published gender pay gap data that pay inequality is widespread across the broadcasting sector, and it is imperative that organisations take immediate action to address this imbalance. The new gender pay gap reporting rules have dramatically improved transparency, and shone a light on inequality and bad practice. I expect our public service broadcasters to lead by example and take effective action.

Julian Knight: This week, the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport heard yet more evidence of how BBC management have grossly failed workers over pay and pensions. Given that one estimate we heard put the BBC liability in the tens of millions, will the Minister urge the BBC to come clean: how much will this gender pay mess cost licence fee payers, and when precisely can workers expect redress?

Margot James: Although the BBC is operationally independent of Government, it must act within the law. We welcome the publication of the BBC’s review of on-air pay and plans to establish a pay policy that rewards people fairly, but it is for the Equality and Human Rights Commission to consider whether to investigate, as the regulatory body responsible, and it has already been in touch with the BBC.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Ealing uniquely boasts—

Mr Speaker: Question 10.

Leaving the EU: UK Musicians

10. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union on arrangements for UK musicians to tour the EU after the UK leaves the EU. [904530]

The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Margot James): I sympathise with the hon. Lady, as I was expecting my other question to go on a bit longer, too.

Music is one of the greatest exports for the UK, and we are determined to ensure that, after Brexit, UK musicians can tour not only the EU but the rest of the world. My Department is working closely with the Department for Exiting the European Union to ensure the best possible outcome for touring musicians on Brexit.

Dr Huq: It is so long since I have had a question, Mr Speaker—[*Laughter.*]

Ealing, uniquely, boasts a plaque on the spot where the Rolling Stones played their first ever gig, in 1962, but international success such as they went on to achieve is imperilled by the fact that when we leave the EU we will leave behind restriction-free movement for musicians, who travel with all their gear and often at short notice. Will the Government consider UK Music’s proposal for an EU-wide music passport covering crews and haulage, so that bands can continue to bring in £1 billion to the economy and so that fans can enjoy them, too?

Margot James: I assure the hon. Lady that nothing would have stopped the success of the Rolling Stones, but she raises a good idea and we will look into all of those things. We are determined to enable musicians to tour Europe effectively after Brexit, and we are supporting them with the music export growth scheme. More than £2 million has been invested to promote 150 acts, and we have to enable them to travel in the way she suggests.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I appreciate that the Minister shares my view that music should be for everyone, but will she agree to meet representatives of the Musicians Union—I declare my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests in that connection—regularly throughout the next 12 months to ensure that its concerns about its members’ ability to tour are dealt with?

Margot James: I certainly meet representatives of the music industry, including Music UK, with which I have already held a roundtable, and I would be happy to meet the Musicians Union as part of my ongoing work to support the sector.

Ballet

11. **Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What recent estimate he has made of the contribution of ballet to the economy. [904531]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Michael Ellis): Dance is at the heart of our UK creative industries, a sector worth £92 billion and growing at twice the rate of the economy. We are incredibly proud of the UK's dance sector, which includes ballet. It is a flagship UK creative industry, boasting world-class companies such as The Royal Ballet, the English National Ballet, Scottish Ballet, Northern Ballet, the Akram Khan Company, Ballet Black, Rambert and many, many more.

Mrs Latham: Does my hon. Friend agree that the UK ballet companies bring a lot of tourism to this country, and that touring abroad is a fantastic showcase for our talented companies, which represent very good value for money?

Michael Ellis: My hon. Friend is the prima ballerina assoluta of the House. I very much agree with her that ballet companies from throughout the United Kingdom are a tremendous asset to our nation, for tourism and other reasons. They continue to be a significant draw for tourists from around the globe.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am very lucky to have Scottish Ballet based in my constituency. What can the Minister do to reassure Scottish Ballet, the ensemble of which includes several European artists, that post-Brexit it will continue to attract talent and will be able to tour as it currently does?

Michael Ellis: I have no doubt that the wonderful Scottish Ballet will continue to draw tourists and specialists in dance from around the world, and that there will be ever-increasing interest in Scottish ballet.

Topical Questions

T1. [904540] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Hancock): I take this opportunity to congratulate all those in Team GB who competed at the Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Pyeongchang. It was one of our most successful Winter Olympics and Paralympics, and Team GB exceeded its medals target with some brilliant performances. I know that the whole House will join me in saying well done to our athletes, who have done their country proud. We continue to support them through the national lottery and look forward to many future successes.

Vicky Foxcroft: As we are talking about competitions, Lewisham is in today's final of the world cup of London boroughs on Twitter, and if anybody has not yet done so, please feel free to vote Lewisham. The competition has been social media at its best: fun and engaging. Unfortunately, we know that social media can also be a platform for bullying and harassment. I know that the Government are consulting on a code of conduct, but when will they finally take action?

Matt Hancock: Of course I congratulate those who win that Twitter competition, but the hon. Lady raises a serious point. We are already taking action, both through the Data Protection Bill, which will protect children online, and more broadly through the internet safety strategy. I pay tribute to Baroness Kidron and other peers who have put a huge amount of effort into getting the details of the Bill right. We continue to work with them to make sure that we do everything we can to make Britain the safest place to be online.

T2. [904541] **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): South Gloucestershire Council's broadband roll-out scheme has been hugely successful so far. It has brought connection up from 61% to 92% in just four years. With fibre-to-the-premises technology being required to connect the remaining households, what more support can the Department give to make sure that rural communities are not left behind?

The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Margot James): As I said earlier, we have changed the national planning policy framework, we have a £30 million rural development programme with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to improve connectivity, and we have a broadband voucher scheme that will provide subsidy for small and medium-sized enterprises and for communities, so that they can connect in an ultrafast way.

Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): When it comes to personal data theft, the Secretary of State said that

"the Leveson inquiry looked into everything in this area, and it was followed by three police investigations... We looked into these things as a society. We had a comprehensive Leveson inquiry."— [Official Report, 1 March 2018; Vol. 636, c. 974.]

Will he tell me which of the inquiries and investigations that he says were comprehensive surfaced the evidence of the illegal data theft of the personal information of Dr David Kelly, who was very distressed when subsequently a journalist from *The Sunday Times* turned up unannounced at his home, just a week before he took his own life?

Matt Hancock: The point that I have made repeatedly about the Leveson inquiry is that it was broad and police investigations followed it. The question we face now is what to do in future. I am determined to make sure that we get the answer to that question right.

Tom Watson: In his non-answer, the Secretary of State has shown that the previous inquiries were not comprehensive. There are still questions to answer, including allegations that at least one senior editor misled the first part of the Leveson inquiry and possibly even perjured himself. In caving in to the press barons, the Secretary of State betrays not just the victims of phone hacking but the promises of the previous Prime Minister. Will he at least have the decency today to admit that he was wrong to tell the House that previous inquiries were comprehensive and got to all the facts of criminal behaviour in our national newspapers?

Matt Hancock: Of course they were comprehensive. If the hon. Gentleman's accusations of perjury, which he is alleging today, are true, then we have rules in place

to deal with them. If there is evidence of criminal wrongdoing, it should be brought forward, and that is the proper way to proceed.

T4. [904544] **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): Britain is well placed to lead the fourth industrial revolution. A new research centre, such as the one proposed by the World Economic Forum, would help us to stay ahead of the curve. Will my right hon. Friend consider its proposal and meet me to discuss it further?

Matt Hancock: I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend on that question. He has done so much to promote the importance of the fourth industrial revolution and artificial intelligence. Indeed, I am on the board of a World Economic Forum body, which is looking into how we can make the most of this, and I look forward to engaging with him on it.

T3. [904543] **Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): The 25 March marks precisely three years since the then Culture, Media and Sport Committee published its report on society lotteries, which was supportive of raising the fundraising limits. With every month that passes, funds that could otherwise go to good causes are instead spent on additional administrative costs arising from outdated fundraising limits. Does the Minister not agree that it is time that those limits are addressed?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): We are considering our position and will be publishing a consultation paper shortly.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): On this day last year, I remember being in the Westminster Parliament during our attack and lockdown. I also remember two years ago on this day being in the Brussels Parliament during that attack. How does the Minister intend for us to continue to interact with Europe on data issues after we have left the EU?

Matt Hancock: There is clearly huge benefit for both the rest of the EU and the UK in having a strong, rich and deep relationship in terms of how data are transferred, but as the evidence of the past few days has shown, that must be done on the basis of strong data protection. That is why we have the Data Protection Bill before the House, and why we think that the GDPR is a good measure that we will not only implement but implement in full, and we will make sure that we have that relationship in the future.

T5. [904545] **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State complains about the data protection legislation that he inherited eight years ago, when Facebook had one tenth of the number of users it has now. Just last year, when I asked him whether he thought that the collection and use of data by Facebook was abusive, he said it was not for his Government to have a view, but that it was an interesting question. Does he now agree that it was abusive, and given that this has happened on his watch, will he agree to bring forward a digital bill of rights which we are pressing for?

Matt Hancock: It is increasingly clear that we need a new settlement with these big tech companies. There is no doubt that the Data Protection Bill currently before

this Parliament takes us significantly forward. I have been worried for some time about these concerns, which is why we brought forward this Bill.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): What assessment has the Department made of the costs of data protection officers for community and parish councils?

The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Margot James): We are aware of the issues facing community and parish councils. As public authorities, they do come under the GDPR. They are able to share a data officer, so that is some help, but we will be reviewing the concerns that they have as a matter of urgency.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): One of my friends took his own life, at least partly as a result of online bullying. Why are the Government still pursuing a model of voluntary codes for social media when they have already demonstrably failed?

Matt Hancock: We have made it extremely clear that we are prepared to legislate further if that is necessary. We are currently consulting on the internet safety strategy. I would be very happy if the hon. Gentleman wanted to feed back into that. We have shown, and made the case, over the past year that this wild west free-for-all of the internet companies must come to an end, and this is a turning point.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Newquay is Cornwall's premier tourist resort, attracting hundreds of thousands of people a week in the summer. However, too many families have the shine taken off their holiday when they get home and find a penalty charge notice from an aggressive parking firm on their door mats. Does the Minister agree that these firms should take more responsibility for the impact their actions have on the tourism industry?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Michael Ellis): I understand that my predecessor went to Newquay and did some bodyboarding, but I cannot guarantee the same activity from this Minister for tourism. All local authorities should think carefully about the impact of parking penalties on tourism generally.

Mr Speaker: We are deeply grateful to the Minister.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York—the second most visited city in the country—is a centre of tourism for visitors from across England. However, the hotel and hospitality sector is really struggling to recruit staff, given the European situation. What is the Minister doing on recruitment and retaining skills in the sector?

Michael Ellis: I visited the city of York just a few weeks ago. It is a beautiful site that clearly attracts large numbers of tourists because of its facilities. As far as staffing is concerned, hotels and other holiday destinations will want to consider carefully how much they pay their staff. With regard to the European situation, I am confident that things will continue to progress in the right direction.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): The Secretary of State and the Minister will probably be bored of me lobbying them about the Bradford Odeon being a recipient of the northern cultural regeneration fund but, if I may, I will

test their patience once more. The project has widespread support across the Leeds city region and among many people in the cultural sector, and it will do a massive amount to regenerate the Bradford district, so can the Bradford Odeon be a recipient of the fund?

Mr Speaker: I do not want the hon. Gentleman suddenly to develop self-effacement, with which he has not traditionally been identified. I have been in the House with him for 13 years and I can honestly say that he has done many things, but he has never, ever bored me.

Matt Hancock: Nobody has done more to make the case for the rejuvenation of the Bradford Odeon than my hon. Friend. The Odeon has applied to our fund for support for its rejuvenation, right in the heart of Bradford, and this man has put his heart and soul into the campaign. We will be announcing the results very soon. I cannot tell him the answer today, but I have a smile on my face.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) may never know—the Secretary of State might one day want his vote.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): What help has the Secretary of State's Department given to Coventry to promote itself as city of culture?

Michael Ellis: I visited Coventry just a short time ago. The city has a wonderful opportunity as city of culture 2021. The tremendous success of Hull as city of culture brought huge sums and huge numbers of visitors to that city, and I am confident that Coventry will benefit in every way, shape and form.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend set out what progress the UK Government have made on ensuring that mobile coverage notspots in rural areas such as my constituency are a thing of the past?

Matt Hancock: We are absolutely determined to ensure that there is decent mobile coverage where people live, work and travel right across the UK. We have made further progress in Scotland than in any other part of the country. There is clearly more to do and we are absolutely determined to do it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, colleagues. Demand is huge, but we are now way over time. We must move on.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Attorney General was asked—

Crown Prosecution Service: Northamptonshire

1. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the performance of the Crown Prosecution Service in Northamptonshire. [904509]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): The CPS in Northamptonshire excels in a number of key areas. For example, its rape conviction rate is nearly 10% above the national average. I also highlight the case of Nicholas

and Joan Taylor, who were convicted of 84 offences related to child abuse committed against 11 victims over a decade. That was the subject of one of the largest investigations conducted by Northamptonshire police, resulting in life sentences with minimum terms of 18 years.

Mr Hollobone: Which aspects of its performance does the CPS in Northamptonshire need to improve?

The Solicitor General: Like any other area, CPS East Midlands is aware of the need to improve its victim communications and liaison, and its engagement with the community, to ensure that the quality of its casework improves. I do, however, commend the service for its work on hate crime, with a conviction rate of over 90%.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Would the CPS in the county, in an alleged case of a police officer mistreating a criminal, be expected to ask whether and when the investigating police first interviewed the recorded officer in charge—the arresting officer—before agreeing to charge someone else?

The Solicitor General: I would expect the CPS to make sure, in any case, that there has been a thorough disclosure exercise involving a proper review of all documentation and a complete review of the history of the case, and that the evidence is followed wherever it leads.

Domestic Abuse: Victim Withdrawal

2. **Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to reduce the level of victim withdrawal in cases involving domestic abuse. [904510]

4. **Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to reduce the level of victim withdrawal in cases involving domestic abuse. [904512]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): The Government see the response to domestic abuse as a top priority. We want every victim to have full confidence in the justice system. When cases go to trial, a number of measures are already in place to support victims to give their best evidence. Where possible, we will take prosecutions forward without victims having to give evidence.

Paul Scully: The new offence of coercive behaviour is an important reform that was introduced by the Government. What success has the CPS had in securing successful prosecutions under this new offence?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight this important reform that I managed to take through as part of the Serious Crime Act 2015. Between the commencement of the offence in December 2015 and April last year, more than 300 cases have been charged and reached a first hearing. That is progress. The offence also allows the police to intervene in relationships at an earlier stage than they have in the past.

Tom Tugendhat: Of course, the importance of the legal change is fundamental, as those of us who followed the story in “The Archers” are particularly aware. However, there is a technological solution to some of this as well.

Will the Solicitor General join me in praising Kent police for its work in introducing body-worn cameras? That can mean that victims do not have to give evidence, ending the situation we so often find when they will not do so.

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to mention body-worn cameras, which can, in a moment, capture the aftermath of an incident of domestic abuse, or indeed an ongoing incident. That often spares the victim from having to bear the complete burden of helping the prosecution to prove the case, or from having to give evidence at all.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Is the Solicitor General aware of the proposal that the Probation Board for Northern Ireland has announced today to introduce a 12-month programme, pre-sentence, for those who are engaged in domestic abuse? Will he consider the contents of that proposal and perhaps introduce it in England as well?

The Solicitor General: I will certainly be interested to consider the contents, although of course this is primarily a matter for my colleagues at the Ministry of Justice. I will say, however, that any programme of engagement with perpetrators needs to be very carefully calibrated. Such programmes can work, but more research needs to be done to make sure that we get it right.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Victim withdrawal is starting to become a problem in cases of revenge pornography, in respect of which the law was changed last year. What additional steps can we take to provide further support to victims to ensure that they get justice?

The Solicitor General: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue of victim withdrawal. The consultation launched by the Government only a couple of weeks ago is looking at further ways to increase support, such as through a presumption that victims in domestic abuse cases will get special measures as opposed to having to demonstrate a particular vulnerability. All the measures that we take, such as preventing complainants from having to go to court by allowing them to give evidence via live link, need to be part of a continuing package. The message needs to go out that victims will not suffer in silence—they will be supported.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I have previously had exchanges with the Solicitor General about data collection. May I ask that in the case of revenge pornography, we now carefully collect data about the number of incidents reported, the number of prosecutions, and the numbers that are dealt with through fines, prison, community orders and harassment orders? In that way, we can monitor whether this is actually working.

The Solicitor General: The hon. Gentleman makes a proper point about the importance of data collection. The issue has been the need to disaggregate particular batches of data so that we understand them better. The CPS has certainly improved on that, and we have started to disaggregate in a number of areas. I will follow up on the specific matter of revenge pornography.

Leaving the EU: Legal Systems

3. **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on the operation of legal systems in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. [904511]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): The Government have introduced the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill to provide for legal continuity when the UK leaves the EU. The Bill minimises disruption to each legal system by preserving current EU rules and conferring powers on UK and devolved Government Ministers to make necessary corrections to those rules. Once we have left the EU, it will be for Parliament and the devolved legislatures to decide whether it is appropriate to make changes to the retained EU rules that operate in each legal system.

Alison Thewliss: The Prime Minister has made a number of concessions regarding the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice after Brexit. Given that the Scottish Government's EU continuity Bill provides that, when exercising devolved jurisdiction, Scottish courts may have regard to the decisions of the ECJ, is it not time to amend clause 6 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill to the same effect?

The Attorney General: As the hon. Lady says, the Government have been realistic about the degree to which our courts are likely to look at the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union, at least until the point at which our law starts to diverge from what will then be European Union law. As I understand it, there was a constructive debate yesterday on clause 11 of the withdrawal Bill in the other place. I hope very much that we will make further progress and that the Scottish National party will engage in that with the proper spirit.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Attorney General agree that one of the advantages of coming out of the European Union superstate in just over 365 days' time is that decisions will be made by not a foreign court, but our Supreme Court?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend is right. One of the things that we rather suspect led a great number of our fellow countrymen and women to vote for European Union exit was exactly that prospect.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) asked the Attorney General to comment on clause 6 of the EU (Withdrawal) Bill. It is not just the Scottish Parliament that thinks that clause 6 is inadequate. Yesterday, the President of the United Kingdom Supreme Court told the House of Lords Constitution Committee that clause 6 as it stands is "very unhelpful" and that it could leave the judiciary at risk of "appearing to make a political decision".

What is the Attorney General going to do to address not just the concerns of the Scottish Parliament, but those of the President of the UK Supreme Court?

The Attorney General: We are already doing a great deal to attempt to reassure the judiciary. The hon. and learned Lady is right to say that yesterday Baroness Hale raised, as others have done before her, concerns that the judiciary have expressed about being put in a position where they are expected to make a political judgment. That is not the Government's intention. We do not expect judges to make political judgments. Indeed, we absolutely want them not to do that. We do want them to be able to interpret the law as it will stand post exit, with all the necessary guidance we can give them. We will continue to work with them to provide the necessary clarity

Cyber-activities: Rule of Law

5. **Mrs Kemi Badenoch** (Saffron Walden) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the application of the rule of law to cyber-activities. [904513]

8. **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the application of the rule of law to cyber-activities. [904516]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): Cyber-space is not a lawless world. When states and individuals engage in hostile cyber-operations, they are governed by the law, just as they are elsewhere. The UK has always been clear that we consider cyber-space to be governed by the wider rules-based international order that we are proud to promote.

Mrs Badenoch: What actions can we take against those countries that we know are carrying out hostile actions in cyber-space?

The Attorney General: Many states accept that international law covers cyber-space. In June 2015, there was a decision by 20 United Nations states to confirm that. Interestingly, one of those 20 states was Russia. Our argument, therefore, is that if there is an internationally wrongful act against the UK in cyber-space or anywhere else, the UK is entitled to respond.

Mary Robinson: In confirming that the UN charter also applies to state actions in cyber-space, will the Attorney General also confirm that that includes the prohibition on the use of force?

The Attorney General: Yes, I can. The UN charter applies in its entirety to cyber-space, including the general prohibition on the use of force and the ability of states to defend themselves.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to get down the Order Paper, so I will take each of the two hon. Members on condition that they give a short sentence each, not two, three, or four sentences.

Mr Sheerman: What is the Attorney General going to do about the horrendous breach of cyber-security by Cambridge Analytica, and who are the right people to prosecute?

The Attorney General: The hon. Gentleman will know from what the Prime Minister said yesterday that the Information Commissioner is already engaged in an investigation. It is important that she has the powers to investigate properly, and the Data Protection Bill, which was referred to previously, will give additional force to that.

Jim Shannon: A C1 cyber-attack is a matter of when, not if. Will the Attorney General outline the steps his Department is taking to protect the masses of digital personal information files held, and are there plans to upgrade this protection?

The Attorney General: I fear that that needs more than a one-sentence answer. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that it is certainly a responsibility not just of the Government, but of each of us, to ensure that data on organisations and individuals is as well protected as it can be.

Mr Speaker: Extreme brevity is now required.

Modern Slavery: Prosecutions

6. **Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): What steps the CPS is taking domestically and internationally to increase the effectiveness of prosecutions in cases involving modern slavery. [904514]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): We are committed to stamping out modern-day slavery both domestically and internationally. Last month, the Director of Public Prosecutions hosted an international summit for 15 countries' prosecutors from around the world; as a result, our international response will be strengthened.

Chris Green: I thank the Solicitor General for that answer. Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate has recently examined the way in which the Crown Prosecution Service deals with modern slavery. What is his assessment of that report?

The Solicitor General: While the report showed that there are areas for improvement, it also showed that the CPS's decision making in complex cases is good, and that successful prosecutions are built from early engagement between the CPS and specialist police teams. I am pleased to say that mandatory face-to-face training for prosecutors on modern slavery is taking place at this very moment.

Crown Prosecution Service: Disclosure Obligations

7. **Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the resources available to the CPS to fulfil its disclosure obligations. [904515]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): The Director of Public Prosecutions has made it clear that the disclosure problems we have been seeing are not caused by resource issues. The challenges are broad and stretch across the criminal justice system, which is why I am pleased that the police and the CPS have come together to take forward their national disclosure improvement plan. As the hon. Lady knows, I am also undertaking a wider review of disclosure, which aims to report by this summer.

Jo Stevens: With so much communication on digital platforms, disclosure is becoming more time-consuming, and without proper resources we cannot have an effective disclosure process. What is the Attorney General going to do about it?

The Attorney General: The hon. Lady is right. In essence, two sets of problems are occurring with disclosure. One is in relation to so-called acquaintance rape cases where, frankly, information that should be disclosed and identified simply has not been. The other set of cases involves exactly the issue she raises: very large quantities of digital material. We have to find smarter ways to analyse and winnow such information so that the right things are disclosed. That is exactly the sort of thing my review will look at.

Leaving the EU: Human Rights

9. **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on the protection of human rights in the UK. [904517]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): The United Kingdom has a long tradition of ensuring that rights and liberties are protected domestically and of fulfilling its international human rights obligations. That will remain true when we have left the European Union.

Hannah Bardell: The Scottish Government's continuity Bill incorporates the charter of fundamental rights into Scots law in so far as it applies to devolved matters. What are the UK Government doing to make sure that everyone in the UK keeps the rights protected by the charter, regardless of where they live in the UK?

The Attorney General: The hon. Lady needs to recognise that the charter of fundamental rights is an EU document—it applies to member states' application of EU law. When we are no longer members of the EU, it does not make much sense for us to continue to adhere to it. On the substance of her point, the Government have been very clear that we will protect the substantive rights in other places, as we already do to a very large degree through domestic law, the European convention on human rights and in other ways.

Crimes against Disabled People: Prosecutions

10. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What steps the CPS is taking to increase the effectiveness of prosecutions for crimes against disabled people. [904518]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): The effects of crimes against disabled people are damaging and wide-ranging, and those crimes have no place in our society. To raise awareness of them, the CPS has revised its public policy statement, and published guides on reporting and recognising hate crime, and a support guide for victims with disabilities.

John Howell: What more can disability groups in my constituency do to raise the question of disability hate crime?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend is right to talk about the invaluable role played by disability support groups. Third-party reporting, where people with disabilities can have the confidence to report a crime, is invaluable. My advice would be for them to work with the police to make sure that we drive up rates of reporting and the number of prosecutions.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least—and never forgotten—I call Priti Patel.

Support for Victims of Crime

11. **Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): What steps the CPS is taking to support victims of crime. [904520]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): The CPS takes its responsibilities to support victims and witnesses very seriously. We want to reduce the stress of court and ensure that all victims and witnesses can give their best evidence. For example, CPS advocates are responsible for speaking to complainants and witnesses before or at court so that they feel better supported.

Priti Patel: Will my hon. and learned Friend explain to my constituent, who was violently assaulted and received horrific life-changing injuries in an awful crime, exactly how the CPS is supporting victims of crime? In this case, the perpetrator of the attack received 22 months in prison and was released early, and the CPS failed to pursue a compensation order against him.

The Solicitor General: I thank my right hon. Friend for the way she is pursuing justice for her constituent. There is a natural limit to what I can say appropriately in the House on this matter, but I wish to offer her a meeting with the chief Crown prosecutor for the east of England to discuss this troubling case in more detail.

Business of the House

10.35 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please update the House on the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): The business for the week commencing 26 March will include:

MONDAY 26 MARCH—General debate on Russia.

TUESDAY 27 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Financial Guidance and Claims Bill [*Lords*].

WEDNESDAY 28 MARCH—If necessary, consideration of Lords amendments, followed by an Opposition day (un-allotted day). There will be a debate entitled “Cuts to local government funding”, followed by a debate entitled “Cuts to police and counter-terrorism funding”. Both debates will arise on an Opposition motion. Followed by, if necessary, consideration of Lords amendments.

THURSDAY 29 MARCH—Debate on a motion on autism, followed by a general debate on matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Committee.

FRIDAY 30 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

Provisional business for the week commencing 16 April will include:

MONDAY 16 APRIL—Second Reading of the Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill [*Lords*] followed by a general debate, subject to be announced.

One year ago today, violence and terror was visited on the streets of Westminster. Five people were killed, and more than 50 injured in a shocking and abhorrent attack on the heart of our democracy. The whole House will want to join me in remembering all the victims of that day, in particular those fatally injured: PC Keith Palmer, Aysha Frade, Kurt Cochran, Leslie Rhodes and Andreea Cristea. Our thoughts are with their loved ones today. We also remember and give thanks to those who kept us safe that day—those who told us to run away from the danger while they ran towards it, putting themselves at risk to keep us all safe. We will always owe them a great debt of gratitude.

Today is a moment for reflection, and to remember those whose lives were so cruelly taken away from them. We unite together in their memory to face down these despicable and cowardly acts. It is in tribute to all those who have lost their lives and suffered in appalling terrorist attacks around the world, including exactly two years ago today in Brussels, that we continue to stand strong in the face of terrorism. We are more determined than ever that terror will never break us, and it will never succeed. Finally, I remind all Members that there will be a short service in Westminster Hall today at 12 noon and all are welcome to attend.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for stating the business in the final week before the Easter recess and for the Opposition-day debate next Wednesday. It seems, however, that we are only getting business for a week and a day, and I do not know what the House will be doing on 18, 19 and 20 April. This week has been like John Cage’s “4’33”’—there have been no notes,

and no votes. It is not as if the Government have not got any business. When will the Leader of the House schedule time for the debates on Report of the Trade Bill, the customs Bill and the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill?

My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) tabled an amendment to introduce a Magnitsky clause, but that was voted down by the Government in Committee. Now, it is apparently back in the Bill, so will the Leader of the House please confirm that the Government will work with the Opposition and ensure that that clause remains as strong as ever?

What news of the restoration and renewal Bill? The Leader of the House said that it was in the process of being drafted by parliamentary counsel, but will she state what the timeframe is? She will recall that the kitchen in the terrace café was out of action. I hope that was nothing to do with the fact that we are not being active in ensuring that the work gets done.

The Leader of the House will know that a point of order was made yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh). The Office for National Statistics has, yet again, had to reprimand the Prime Minister for using statistics in a misleading way—this time, on police funding. The Leader of the House wrote a letter on 19 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) in which she repeated that inaccuracy. Will the Leader of the House apologise today for that inaccuracy or place a letter of apology in the Library?

I asked for a debate on the statutory instrument abolishing nursing bursaries for post-graduate nursing students in early-day motion 937.

[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 (S.I., 2018, No. 136), dated 5 February 2018, a copy of which was laid before this House on 6 February, be annulled.]

I asked on 22 February, 1 March, 8 March and 15 March—nothing. There is a tradition when statutory instruments are prayed against that we have a debate. If the Government do not want the regulations, they can just vote against them. They will affect returners and life-long learners: people who are committed to nursing. How can the Government deny them that opportunity and deny the Opposition the opportunity to vote against these retrograde regulations? The Leader of the House announced a general debate on Russia on Monday. I would be pleased to support any changes to business, so we can debate the statutory instrument, which will come into effect on Wednesday.

May we have an urgent debate on the allocation of a contract to a French company? The production of British passports is moving away from Gateshead to a French company. If the French can use the national security argument to keep their passport contract with their companies, so can we. Will the Leader of the House confirm why the Government did not use that argument, because this is a matter of national security?

Speaking of Europe, the Prime Minister will make a speech on Monday, on her return from discussions in Brussels. The Opposition were the first to call for sensible transitional arrangements to protect jobs and the economy, while the Government pursued reckless red lines that have now gone green: on no negotiation

on future relationship until after transition, a concession; on the UK to pull out of the common fisheries policy as soon as we are out of the EU, a concession—or is it a dead haddock?—and on continuing to pay into the EU until 2064, a concession.

The shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has visited the Sweden-Norway border and the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. I asked last week whether the Prime Minister had visited the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Will the Leader of the House say whether the Prime Minister has plans to do so, given that crucial negotiations on Ireland are taking place next week?

The UK has to abide by EU jurisdiction—we heard the Attorney General say so—during the transition period. That, too, is a concession. If the Government want the jurisdiction of our courts, they have to get their own house in order. I suggest that the Leader of the House and all members of the Government read the book by the Secret Barrister, who states:

“Walk into any court in the land, speak to any lawyer, ask any judge and you will be treated to uniform complaints of court deadlines being repeatedly missed, cases arriving underprepared, evidence lost, disclosures of evidence not being made, victims made to feel marginalised and millions of pounds of public money wasted.”

Cuts to the Ministry of Justice will amount to almost 40%. That is nearly half the Department. When can we have an urgent debate on the cuts to our world-class, excellent legal service?

Today, we remember two anniversaries. Johnathan Ball would have been 28, and Tim Parry would have been 37. Both died in Warrington 25 years ago this week. A generation of children have grown up with over 20 years of peace, which has made the island of Ireland a thriving place to live, work and enjoy the culture. What plans are there to mark the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday agreement?

Canon Pat Browne reminded us yesterday at mass that there will be a service at 12 noon in Westminster Hall, which I will join the Leader of the House in attending. At 2 pm and 6 pm in St Mary Undercroft, there will be ecumenical services to remember PC Keith Palmer, Andreea Christea, Aysha Frade, Leslie Rhodes and Kurt Cochrane, who were killed on this day a year ago. From the Doorkeepers, the police and security services, and the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), none of us in the Chamber can forget that day. Those services will help us to remember and give thanks for the lives of those who died and to give thanks for those who keep us safe, so that we can do our work for the good of the country.

Andrea Leadsom: I join the hon. Lady in remembering those who died 25 years ago in appalling atrocities. This has to stop, and we remain united in our determination to stamp out terrorism in all its shapes and forms.

The hon. Lady asks why there were no votes. I suggest she discuss that with her own party, since it clearly agrees with the Government's proposed legislation, hence there are no votes. She should understand that that is how government works. On the Magnitsky amendments, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe and the Americas has made it clear that he is looking carefully at the Opposition amendments, and

the Government will come forward with their own to ensure that our response to human rights abuses is as strong as possible.

The hon. Lady asks about progress on the restoration and renewal of the Palace. Work is under way to recruit the external members of the shadow sponsor board and shadow delivery authority. The Bill is still being drafted, and I will of course update the House in due course. The lights went out on the Principal Floor because someone hit an electric wire that was not where it was supposed to be, which I think is pretty standard in buildings of this age but to be regretted nevertheless, and it was repaired as soon as possible.

On the UK Statistics Authority and police funding, I want to be very clear that the police funding settlement for 2018-19 that we set out delivers an increase in overall police funding. We aim to communicate that as clearly as possible to the public and have said repeatedly that about £270 million of the up to £450 million increase in police funding next year results from increased council tax precept income, which is dependent on police and crime commissioners' decisions. Since the funding settlement, almost all PCCs have decided to use this flexibility to raise extra precept income. That said, the Home Office chief statistician will carefully consider the suggestions from the UK Statistics Authority.

The hon. Lady asks for a debate on the statutory instrument on nursing bursaries. I hope that she will appreciate that, despite the many competing demands on business, including very important fast-track legislation on Northern Ireland this week, the Government have found time for a debate last week on four SIs prayed against by the official Opposition, an Opposition day debate next week, a full day's debate on Russia next week, which was requested in last week's business questions, and a Back-Bench business debate next week. I am trying, wherever possible, to accommodate all wishes right across the House, and I will continue to do so.

The hon. Lady asks about passports and the tender potentially being won by a French company over a UK company. We compete in a global marketplace. That is the case and will continue to be the case. Wherever there are specific security issues, those, for security reasons, will be dealt with in the UK, but great UK companies compete on a world stage and often win business around the world, and they will continue to do so, both before and after we leave the EU. She will be aware, however, that as a current member of the EU, we are subject to the EU's procurement rules.

The hon. Lady asks about the negotiations for leaving the EU. She will be aware that the Government absolutely intend to get a very good free trade deal with the EU after we leave, but it is important for UK businesses and citizens that we have an implementation period that enables us to avoid a cliff edge. As we make preparations for a life outside the EU, this implementation period will give certainty to all those impacted by it. She asks whether the Prime Minister has plans to visit Northern Ireland. I really cannot answer that question; I am not in charge of the Prime Minister's diary, but she will be aware that the Prime Minister has frequently visited both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in recent weeks and months.

Finally, the hon. Lady asks how we would be commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday agreement. The agreement along with its successors

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have been fundamental in helping Northern Ireland to move forward from its violent past to a brighter, more secure future. The Government's support for the 1998 agreement remains, and will remain, steadfast.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the regulation of social media? At the moment, people do not have to leave their addresses when they post messages. Given the level of abusive and offensive messages, even when someone has died, is it not about time that these people were shown up for the moronic cowards that they are?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend makes a very good point and gives a very good description of those who abuse others anonymously online. We expect all social media platforms to make it easy for users to choose not to receive anonymous posts. The Prime Minister has recently announced that we will introduce a social media code of practice to address conduct that is bullying or insulting to users. It will provide guidance for platforms and will cover anonymous abuse.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. I also want to pay tribute to all those involved in last year's dreadful attack on this House. We will never forget that day, but we went home at the end of that day as this House was made safe for us. Some of our community within Parliament did not quite make that, and it is those we will remember today.

The whole fallout from Cambridge Analytica and its connections with the Government is getting murkier and murkier. We now know that three Departments had contracts with the parent company, SCL Group, that the founding chair was a former Tory MP and that a director had donated over £700,000 to the Conservative party. May we have a full statement from the Prime Minister, so that we can gently probe her about the full scale of the Government's connections with Cambridge Analytica? This is not going to go away for this Government.

We need a full debate on the great fishing sell-out. Fishing communities across Scotland are furious with this Government and cannot believe that they are being sold out once again. That anger was only compounded by the ridiculous stunt on the Thames yesterday, when the Scottish fish chuckers threw perfectly good fish into it. The Tories will never, ever be trusted on fishing again, and they will deserve everything that is coming their way from fishing communities at the next election.

Lastly, may we please have a full statement on le passeport bleu? We can simply feel the upset and fury from all these Brexiteers. How dare these Europeans get their mitts on our blue passports, this new symbol of a free Britain? Forget Agincourt, forget Waterloo, forget Trafalgar—we must say no to these French passport makers. Will the Leader of the House join me in my campaign to make the British passport great again?

Andrea Leadsom: As ever, the hon. Gentleman has a great note to end on. I certainly support his desire to see Great Britain great again, independent and a very strong proponent of global free trade. Our very clear intention is that we will compete on a global stage and be trading right around the world freely and openly.

The hon. Gentleman is exactly right to pay tribute to all those who suffered so terribly a year ago today, and I am grateful to him for his considered thoughts.

On Cambridge Analytica, the Conservative party has never employed Cambridge Analytica or its parent company, nor has it used their services. However, it is absolutely right that people must have confidence that their personal data will be protected. The Information Commissioner is investigating this matter, and she will ensure that Facebook, Cambridge Analytica and all the organisations involved must co-operate fully. The Government's Data Protection Bill will strengthen data protection legislation and give the Information Commissioner's Office tougher powers to ensure that organisations comply.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman raises the common fisheries policy. Let us be clear: it would be helpful if he was clear that his Scottish National party's proposal is that UK fishing communities remain within the common fisheries policy forever: the unjust reduction in our fishing communities over the past 43 years, as a result of the common fisheries policy, should endure forever and ever, according to his party.

As for what this Government are seeking to do, we made very clear at the outset of negotiations that specific arrangements for fisheries should be agreed during the implementation period. Our proposal was that we should sit alongside other coastal states as a third party. We pressed very hard for this negotiation, and, as a former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I myself was very keen to ensure that it happened. It is absolutely clear that that was our intention. However, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, I hope, that this is a negotiation and that the EU was not willing to move on the issue. That is disappointing, but we have protections in place for our fishing communities during the implementation period, and after that we will be in control of all our own fishing policies.

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Further to the fishy question from the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), the House will recognise that perhaps the most iniquitous aspect of the lamentable European Union is the common fisheries policy. Only the EU could devise a policy which, paradoxically, is simultaneously injurious to the interests of both fishermen and fish. My right hon. Friend has confirmed that we will leave that policy, but she must also know that the discard ban that the European Union has devised comes into force during the implementation period. Will she ask those responsible to come to the House and tell us how they can reconcile our departure from the policy with that discard ban?

Mr Speaker: Order. We are extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, but I fear—I am going to be generous to him—that he was slightly led astray by the Leader of the House giving us quite a long statement, which I am sure we much enjoyed, about her personal views and so on when she was Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. All that is, I am sure, extremely interesting, not least to her—[*Laughter*]—but this session is about the business of the House next week. It is not about people making long personal statements which some might think are perhaps just a tad self-indulgent.

Andrea Leadsom: My sincere apologies, Mr Speaker, if there was anything fishy about my reply to the last question.

What I can say to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) is that the UK has been a strong advocate for the sustainable management of fisheries, and will continue to promote sustainable fishing when we leave the EU. Arrangements for the implementation period will not change that.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I am glad to see that Back-Bench business is to return to the House next week after a three-week holiday. We are very grateful for that. I also note that there is to be a general debate on Monday 16 April. The Backbench Business Committee could help the Leader of the House by suggesting a topic for the debate, should that be required.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) is racing back to the House, having attended her mother's funeral yesterday. In her constituency, which is next door to mine, is the De La Rue factory, which currently produces the British passport. I note the potential announcement of a decision to award the contract to the French-Dutch company Gemalto, with production likely to take place in France. It is interesting that the French Government should circumvent EU procurement rules for the manufacture of passports, citing national security as a reason to keep production in France. Could the Home Secretary make a statement that she will secure British production of British passports and the high-quality and highly skilled jobs of De La Rue workers in Gateshead, and could that statement be made quite soon?

Andrea Leadsom: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his offer of help with a subject for the debate on 16 April. I will certainly take it into account. As for his point about passports, I am very sympathetic to it, and I commend the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) for her support for De La Rue. Home Office questions will take place on our first day back after the Easter recess, and the hon. Lady may well wish to raise the issue directly then.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): We guard our freedom of speech in the House very dearly, and it is something that you rightly and robustly defend on our behalf, Mr Speaker, but we often do not allow our constituents the same freedoms. Recent court cases have put the whole issue of freedom of speech into the public domain. Ricky Gervais and David Baddiel have joined forces on the issue. Ricky Gervais has said:

"A man has been convicted in a UK court of making a joke that was deemed 'grossly offensive'. If you don't believe in a person's right to say things that you might find 'grossly offensive', then you don't believe in Freedom of Speech."

May we have a debate about freedom of speech in this country, something that it has long held dear but is in danger of throwing away needlessly?

Andrea Leadsom: I commend my hon. Friend on raising this important issue. We do of course fully support free speech; however, there are limits to it and he will be aware that there are laws around what we are allowed to say. I do not know the circumstances of his specific point, but he might well wish to seek an Adjournment debate to take this up directly with Ministers.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): With 1 million homes in this country unfit for habitation, I am absolutely thrilled that the Government backed my Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation and Liability for Housing Standards) Bill in January, but that support will mean nothing if we are not able to make progress through the remaining stages into Committee. At the moment, there is nothing on the horizon; will the Leader of the House ensure that time is made available to make progress on this important legislation?

Andrea Leadsom: First, I commend the hon. Lady on her Bill, which really will seek to improve the quality and fitness of houses for human habitation. The Government are pleased to support it and, as I said to the House last week and the week before, the Government will bring forward money resolutions on a case-by-case basis, and we are working towards supporting her Bill.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): There were many police officers at the remarkable memorial service yesterday for Sean O'Callaghan, and many of the police deserve congratulations on their constant bravery on blue-light calls dealing with terrorism, road traffic crashes and many other things that are awful to take part in.

On early-day motion 1093, and linked to an article in this week's *Private Eye* and the book "Behind The Blue Line: My Fight Against Racism and Discrimination in the Police", may we have a debate in Government time on whether the Metropolitan police should ask for a similar inquiry to the one by Sir Richard Henriques into the allegations against Lord Bramall, Ted Heath and Leon Brittan?

[That this House calls for an inquiry into the investigations and prosecution decisions that preceded the acquittal of retired Metropolitan Police Sergeant Councillor Gurpal Virdi, to establish how there could be a trial without evidence from PC Markwick and PC Mady, how PC Makins could be a prosecution witness when his statement contradicted specific claims by the complainant, how the Crown Prosecution Service could have believed the false allegation of indecent assault with a collapsible baton a decade before they were introduced, and to establish why the Independent Police Complaints Commission referred Mr Virdi's complaint to the Metropolitan Police Department of Professional Standards whose peculiar original investigation led to the false statements about Mr Virdi and to the unjustified prosecution.]

The good Asian police sergeant Gurpal Virdi was charged inappropriately and investigated badly, and I am reminded of many of the comments Matthew Scott made about Sir Richard's report, including the

"jaw-dropping naivety, asinine stupidity and Clouseauesque incompetence in allowing themselves to be duped by a man who is plainly either a dishonest chancer or a loopy fantasist."

These things matter and they matter to the police.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises a serious matter, and I understand that the Crown Prosecution Service has previously provided him with a more detailed explanation of the decision-making in this case. The decision to prosecute Mr Virdi was made in accordance with the test set out in the code for crown prosecutors and he was subsequently acquitted by the jury after a full trial. Any decision on whether to prosecute a criminal

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matter is for the police and ultimately the CPS to take, but I urge my hon. Friend to raise this at the next Home Office questions just after the Easter recess.

Mr Speaker: Will the hon. Gentleman apply for an Adjournment debate on the matter?

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): He has already had it.

Mr Speaker: It is a point I have often made myself. I was being kinder to the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) than the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) was; it was really a preface to the book which is to follow.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The Leader of the House might be aware that this Tuesday the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg) and I had the inaugural meeting of the cross-party group on social media and the impact on children's mental health. Following the report of the Royal Society for Public Health that social media might be more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol, may I again ask the Leader of the House to find Government time for a debate on this important issue and start helping to tackle the effect of social media on people's mental health?

Andrea Leadsom: I am incredibly sympathetic to what the hon. Gentleman says and commend him on taking this work forward. He will be aware that the Government are putting a record £1.4 billion into children and young people's mental health, and we are committed to ensuring that 70,000 more children and young people each year will have access to high-quality NHS care and support when they need it. He raises an important and specific point about the impact of social media on young people's mental health and I encourage him to seek a Backbench Business Committee debate or Westminster Hall debate so all hon. Members can share their views on it.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): The Government today will announce and approve the takeover of West Somerset by Taunton Deane Borough Council. It has a lamentable record of bad management and, I am afraid, crooked deals. This is no more than a shotgun wedding and would not have happened if Ministers had listened to what some of us were saying. We still need a debate in this place on local government; please may we have it?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend will be aware that we have had a number of local government debates in recent weeks. I encourage him to seek to discuss this matter, which he has raised on many occasions, directly with Ministers.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): For the past two years, I have been helping a constituent with her ongoing attempts to have her former local government employer rightfully added to the redundancy modification order. Her employer has been seeking addition to the list for eight years, and counting. Throughout this time, Ministers have consistently dismissed inquiries with the response that the RMO is under review, providing no further information and no suggestion of when the process will be completed. May we have a debate in Government time on the unacceptable length of time

being taken for the ongoing redundancy modification order review, and on its effects on my constituent and many others across the UK?

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising this matter, which is clearly an important one in her constituency. If she would like to write to me separately about it, I will take it up with the relevant Department on her behalf.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): During the snowstorms of the past few weeks, when parts of the country were brought to a standstill, we rightly praised our emergency services and local council workers for helping to keep our country moving, but our farmers also played a vital role, certainly in constituencies such as mine. They went over and above in helping schoolchildren to get to school and nurses to get to hospitals. May we have a debate on the extra value that our family farmers add to our rural communities, to show that they are the backbone of this country and should be valued, both before and after Brexit?

Andrea Leadsom: I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the valuable role played by farmers across our economy and in our communities. I was personally very impressed by the way in which farmers helped during the recent snow events. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs published a consultation document on 27 February seeking views on farming arrangements after we leave the EU, including on how farmers can play a broader role—as indeed they already do. This will include looking into how we can maintain the resilience of our rural communities, particularly in upland areas, where farming plays a significant role in the rural economy. I encourage all hon. Members and their constituents to respond to the consultation, and my hon. Friend might like to secure a Westminster Hall debate so that all hon. Members can share their views on this subject.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Yesterday, James Douglas, a constituent of the Deputy Speaker, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton), made a statement to the all-party parliamentary group on motor neurone disease. As the Leader of the House will be aware, a third of people with motor neurone disease will die within the first year of diagnosis. James applied for the personal independence payment. They spent four hours completing the form, and he had a face-to-face assessment. He was awarded zero points. His consultant has now given him a DS1500, which means that he is likely to die within six months. The Scottish Parliament is introducing an amendment that gives the definition of end of life as two years. May we have a debate on how this Parliament could also show that level of compassion, so that people such as James do not have to go through this trauma?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises a particular situation that I think we would all be incredibly sympathetic to. I would certainly urge her to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise the matter directly with Ministers to see what more can be done.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and I have spoken on a few occasions about the importance of banks on

our high streets, and about what happens when they close. Will she therefore congratulate Lisa Kear and the Belmont and South Cheam Residents Association on their work on opening up a new sub-post office in Belmont village in my constituency? May we have a debate in Government time to talk about community infrastructure and the benefit of banks, post offices and, indeed, pubs as community hubs?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises something that is important to all of us in our constituencies, namely the incredible value that we get from local community shops, post offices and the banking system. I am happy to join him in congratulating Lisa Kear and the Belmont and South Cheam Residents' Association on their work in opening a sub-post office. Often where there is no bank in a community, it is the post office that enables people to continue to get the access to banking that is so essential for us all.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): As we approach the end of the financial year, the NHS funding formula is seriously failing the NHS. In York, the deficit will be some £45 million, resulting in cuts to vital services. May we have a debate in Government time about why the funding formula is failing the NHS and patients?

Andrea Leadsom: Our NHS has had over £13 billion more to spend on caring for people since 2010. There are almost 43,000 more clinical staff looking after patients, with nearly 15,000 more doctors and nearly 14,000 more nurses on our wards. This Government are ensuring that we are properly funding our NHS in line with the five-year forward view set out by the NHS itself.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Yesterday, I was pleased to entertain Ben McCarthy and Tyler Reeve—two young people from Healing School in my constituency—who won a Humberside police Lifestyle award for work in connection with organ donation. May we have a debate to encourage young people to get involved in projects like that and in the National Citizen Service? Getting more involved in their communities will improve the quality of their lives no end and may lead them into becoming involved in the political process.

Andrea Leadsom: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the recipients of the awards, including the overall winners, the Tribesmen, for their amazing campaign to change organ donation laws. The Lifestyle initiative is a fantastic way to get young people out and about and helping in their communities. As the programme approaches its 29th year, I wish it lots of luck and success for many more years.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House grant me support for an early debate on the sad decline of our towns and cities? Everywhere we go, up and down the country, we see graffiti, broken pavements, rubbish piling up in the streets, and rough sleepers. Is it not about time that we gave local authorities the resources to do their job? Will she also join me and a group of parliamentarians in rolling up our sleeves and clearing up some of the filth all around this great royal palace?

Andrea Leadsom: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his initiative. A couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to join in the Great British Spring Clean in my constituency, and I know that many right hon. and hon. Members have been doing the same. We need actions, not words. It is important that we all get involved, and he is right that we need to do everything we can to stop the low-level antisocial behaviour that leads to litter on our streets and so on. When I was the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I was pleased to launch the first national litter strategy for England, which included many more penalties for those who litter. I commend the hon. Gentleman for his initiative.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Leader of the House will know that the independent inspector of Northamptonshire County Council has recommended that commissioners go in and the abolition of the county council. One of the criticisms was the selling of capital assets for revenue purposes. It is apparent that the council is trying to sell its headquarters for around £50 million, without a proper valuation, before the commissioners go in, and it may even be trying to sign the contract today. May we have a statement next week from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government about the situation? What advice can we give to the county council, which might be taking an unlawful action?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is concerned, as I am, about what has happened in Northamptonshire County Council, and the new interim group leader is taking swift steps to try to improve the situation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make a statement about the council's future—hopefully as early as next week.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The number of ambulance staff and other emergency workers who nowadays are faced with sexual assaults is rising dramatically. Unfortunately the police and the other prosecuting authorities quite often refuse to take such assaults very seriously, but there is a possible legislative answer. Would it not be a good idea if, when my private Member's Bill, the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill, comes back for its remaining stages on 27 April, the Government were to support my amendment to include sexual assault as an aggravating factor?

Andrea Leadsom: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his private Member's Bill, which the Government were delighted to support. It is absolutely vital that we protect our emergency workers from any form of attack. I was not aware of the hon. Gentleman's amendment, but I will certainly take that away and look at it very carefully.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): This week the Cardiff rugby heritage museum was launched, with over 800 items of rugby memorabilia from each season since 1876. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the dedicated volunteers of CF10 Rugby Trust, whose love of Cardiff rugby and history has made this happen? May we have a debate on the great game of rugby?

Andrea Leadsom: I would certainly put my name to such a debate. I would be a big fan. *[Interruption.]* Yes, I might be slightly in favour of England, but only slightly, because every part of our great United Kingdom works for me, and as I took full credit for the triumph of Scotland in the Calcutta cup, so I would also like to benefit from any triumphs by the Welsh rugby team. I congratulate the hon. Lady on raising this point in the Chamber, and I absolutely support the game of rugby.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): The Leader of the House will have seen the recent report on the surge in addiction to prescription opioid drugs. When that is combined with the already enormous levels of alcohol and gambling addictions, it is clear that the country has a major legal addictions problem. Will the Government now bring forward a report to the House on the appalling human, social and financial cost of these addictions, outlining how Ministers propose to tackle them?

Andrea Leadsom: I think we have all been concerned by the recent reports of excessive use of opioids, and the hon. Gentleman also raises issues of gambling and alcohol addiction. Those are all very serious social concerns, and I encourage him to seek a Back-Bench debate on this subject, so that Members from across the House may share their opinions.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The report commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, “The cumulative impact of tax and welfare reforms”, paints a really stark picture of the impact of the Government’s policies on some of the most vulnerable in our society. May we have an urgent debate in Government time to discuss those findings, in the hope that the Government might finally face facts and halt their harmful programme of austerity?

Andrea Leadsom: I take issue with the hon. Lady’s assessment. This Government have been committed to helping people, from wherever they come, back into work. Universal credit, as a benefit, is enabling more people to have the incentive to get into work without immediately losing their benefits. The Government are supporting people with disabilities back into work. There are 600,000 more disabled people in work than there were in 2010. The Government’s intention throughout has been to enable people to improve the quality of their lives, and to get into the workplace. It is no surprise that there are now over 3 million more jobs, with some of the highest employment levels ever, which gives more people the chance to have the security of a wage packet for themselves and their families.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Yesterday was the first day of spring, and the Government said that they would be publishing their serious violence strategy in spring. All I want to know is, when will you be publishing it, and when you do, may we have a debate on it in Government time?

Mr Speaker: I will not be publishing it, but the Leader of the House might, and we will, I am sure, be deeply obliged to her if she does.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises this issue frequently and is right to do so. The Government’s serious violence strategy will be brought forward soon. It is an incredibly important area and the Government

are looking closely at what more can be done to take young people away from the prospects of a life that involves serious crime.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): NHS England and Staffordshire police have decided to relocate the children’s sexual assault referral centre in Cobridge in my constituency to Walsall. That is a two-hour, 17-minute journey on public transport; instead of a matter of a few miles, it will be over 40 for my constituents. May we have a debate in Government time on the responsibilities of statutory agencies, to consider the impact of their cost-saving measures on people who need to travel to use these vital services?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises an important constituency issue and I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise it directly with Ministers.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): The Leader of the House’s response on police funding was disappointing. The Prime Minister and the Home Office have repeatedly made it clear that £450 million will be made available from the Government, which is why the UK Statistics Authority ruled that they would lead the public to believe that. Not a single penny is being made available from central Government. The Leader of the House went further than that in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), stating that more money would be available, on top of the £450 million. Will she therefore take this opportunity to apologise to the House and make it clear that not one penny is going from central Government on our much-stretched, overworked local police forces?

Andrea Leadsom: Whether the source of taxpayer funding is central Government or local government, it is still taxpayer funding. We have been clear that £270 million of the up to £450 million increase would result from increased council tax precept income—something that police and crime commissioners have, for the most part, decided to take advantage of. *[Interruption.]* It is really important: this is all taxpayer funding, whether it comes from central or local government.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): As chair of the all-party group on deafness, I have been trying to identify which Department is primarily responsible for British Sign Language. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport says it is the Department for Work and Pensions, as does the Department for Education. The DWP says, “Oh, no we’re not. We are going to be speaking to the DFE.” The Cabinet Office says there is no Department primarily responsible for BSL. Can the Leader of the House advise me to whom I should write to seek a meeting to discuss these important matters and to seek a statement to the House on BSL?

Andrea Leadsom: I can certainly offer to find out on the hon. Gentleman’s behalf and write to him.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I am sure we are all looking forward to supporting Team Scotland at the Gold Coast Commonwealth games and, beyond that, at Birmingham 2022. Given that the Government are funding Birmingham to the tune of

£560 million, after giving Glasgow 2014 not a single penny, may we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport confirming that the Scottish Government and the other devolved Administrations will receive the appropriate Barnett consequentials that should flow from this funding?

Andrea Leadsom: I hope the hon. Gentleman raised that at DCMS oral questions, which preceded this session. If he did not, perhaps he would like to take it up directly with Ministers, as it is not a question I can answer right here.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): On the anniversary of the Westminster attack and nine months after my constituency was attacked, the Government are today announcing plans to update terror insurance legislation. It is estimated that more than 4.8 million UK businesses are not currently covered by the Government-backed pool reinsurance system. Will Ministers allow time to discuss how to bring all UK employers into coverage and to offer hope to the 150 businesses at London Bridge and Borough market which collectively lost more than £2 million last year.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point and he is right to say that the Government intend to bring forward measures to ensure that businesses can be covered. If he would like to write to me about his specific constituency issues, I can forward that letter to the relevant Department to answer his specific question.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Earlier, at DCMS questions, I was directed back to the House in trying to secure a display of Great Grimsby's original town seal, the 1201 charter for the town and stained-glass work of local artist John Frear within the Houses of Parliament. Will the Leader of the House advise me on how I can best secure that? Would a debate be of use or is there another route?

Andrea Leadsom: I am wondering whether this is a matter for you, Mr Speaker. [*Interruption.*] Perhaps the best thing would be if I came back to the hon. Lady on this in writing.

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): For each of the past three weeks, the Government have failed to lay a money resolution to allow the Committee stage of the Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Bill to go ahead, so the Committee has had to be cancelled three weeks in a row, at very short notice. Will the Leader of the House explain the reason for these delays? Can she confirm whether the money resolution will be laid this coming week, so that the Committee can complete its work on Wednesday morning?

Andrea Leadsom: Discussions are carrying on through the usual channels and money resolutions will be brought forward on a case-by-case basis as soon as possible.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): May we have a debate on Home Office incompetence? Following urgent and serious allegations—including the sexual assault of a vulnerable woman and a data breach—that were passed to me by a constituent, I wrote to the relevant Minister on 24 October, but received a letter in

response just this week. Until my intervention, another constituent was being denied indefinite leave to remain because he had not appealed a decision, but the Home Office had not even sent the letter out in time to allow him to do so. I can go through a number of cases from my constituency casework in which the Home Office has been incompetent; may we have a debate to expose this to the House?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady might be aware that the turnaround times for Departments' correspondence are monitored and transparent, so that information would be available to her. I suggest that she raises that issue directly with Home Office Ministers on 16 April, which is the first day back after recess.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I declare an interest as the chairman of the all-party group on off-patent drugs. I recently visited the Institute of Medical Genetics for Wales to see the excellent work being done there. May we have a debate on the future of personalised medicine, which is at the very cutting edge of research into cancer and rare diseases?

Andrea Leadsom: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his commitment to personalised drugs, which are certainly the way of the future. The UK is at the forefront of many of the new ideas that are coming forward on personalised drugs. In the first instance, I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can hear an update from Ministers on our progress in this policy area.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Tomorrow, I am going to visit Barnsley College. Many of its students go on to serve our NHS, yet they will now face huge debts if they study nursing. Will the Leader of the House finally answer the question and schedule a vote on the regulations next week, in Government time, before the 40-day limit runs out?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will be aware that the statutory instrument refers to postgraduate nursing. The previous arrangements were not working—the costs were largely picked up by the NHS, forcing a cap on the numbers that could undergo training—and the opportunity to move to the same system of student loans as other courses would make further finance available to postgraduate nurses. That is the purpose of the statutory instrument. As I said to the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), we have had quite a busy agenda, but we were able to make Government time available last week to debate four statutory instruments that had been prayed against. I shall take the thoughts of the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) into consideration and see what more can be done.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): May we have a debate in Government time on the long-term strategy for drug and substance misuse support? Cities such as Stoke-on-Trent are slashing their funding, which may provide a short-term cash boost to their budgets but has a long-term social impact. Unfortunately, there seems to be no national strategy, so a debate or statement from the relevant Minister would be welcome.

Andrea Leadsom: I completely sympathise with what the hon. Gentleman says. It is vital that we provide support for people to get off drugs and out of the criminality that is often associated with them. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate if he wants to discuss the specific issues in his constituency.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): May we have a Government statement on immigration guidance? My Mount Vernon constituent, Hisashi Kuboyama, is currently in limbo: he is trying to take his “Life in the UK” test, but the only way he can do that is if he gets his passport or biometrics card, which are being held by the Home Office. May we have a Government statement about the way the Home Office operates and how it hinders constituents?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises an important constituency issue, as he often does. I am happy to take it up with the Home Office on his behalf, if he would like me to do so. On his more general point about a Home Office statement, I encourage him to seek perhaps an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate to pick up the more general issue.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): My constituent, Christine McBain, is one of 167 of my constituents in Glasgow North East who have had work carried out under the Government’s green deal scheme. She is now unable to sell her house because the rogue green deal installer did not obtain a building warrant prior to the work starting. With the Government starting the green deal scheme again, will the Leader of the House call for a debate or ministerial statement to ensure that the Government will compensate and protect people who, like my constituent Christine, have found themselves in limbo as a result of a Government-backed scheme? She was only trying help the environment and save money.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the importance of these green deals that enable our constituents to do their bit to help prevent climate

change. On specific complaints, there is a process by which his constituent can complain. If the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me about this, I can pick up the specific complaint directly with Ministers.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): As we speak, in India, an application for an independent medical examination of my constituent, Jagtar Singh Johal, is being made in relation to accusations of torture nearly four months ago. Does the Leader of the House agree that, given the very important report by Redress, a notable charity, and the up and coming Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in April, it is now time for Government time to be given to debate the torture and ill-treatment of UK nationals abroad?

Andrea Leadsom: The UK Government, of course, take every step possible to ensure good treatment of UK nationals wherever they find themselves, and we strive very hard to ensure that our views are made clear to all those who would perpetrate such crimes against UK nationals. With regard to the specific individual mentioned, again, if the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me, I can take the matter up with Home Office Ministers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): We have heard descriptions of systematic violence and discrimination against Shi’a Bahrainis. The religious and military textbook of the Bahraini Ministry of Defence labels Shi’a Muslims as infidels. Numerous Shi’a figureheads and scholars, including Sheikh Isa Qassim and Hasan Mushaima, have had their citizenship revoked and been charged with vague crimes. These are serious times in Bahrain. Will the Leader of the House agree to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office making a statement on this matter to the House?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a very serious case. I encourage him to seek the opportunity to debate this further with Foreign Office Ministers.

Grenfell Update

11.31 am

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement to update the House on support for those affected by the Grenfell tragedy and on the second report from the independent recovery taskforce. This report will be published in full on gov.uk and placed in the Library of the House.

Nine months on, the shocking and terrible events of 14 June continue to cast a long shadow. I know that it cannot have been easy for the survivors and the bereaved to hear last week about the failure of a fire door from the tower, which was tested as part of the Metropolitan Police Service's investigation. I am confident that the police and the public inquiry will, in time, provide answers. But, having met survivors and heard their stories, I know that that does not take away from the pain and loss being suffered now by those left behind. Their welfare remains our highest priority, and we see that through our continued work supporting the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and through the valuable work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), the Minister responsible for the Grenfell victims. We are ensuring that the voices and concerns are heard right across Government. That work is supported by my Department and, more widely, by the NHS, by local government and by the voluntary sector.

I give my thanks to everyone who has gone that extra mile to be there for a community that has gone through so much. I also thank the taskforce for its work in helping us to ensure that, after the slow and confused initial response to the disaster, the people of North Kensington are receiving better support from RBKC to help them to recover and to rebuild their lives.

I was clear when I reflected on the taskforce's first report in November that, while progress was being made, I expected to see swift, effective action to address all the issues that were highlighted, particularly the slow pace of delivery and the need for greater empathy and emotional intelligence—two things that are vital if RBKC is to regain the trust of the people that it serves.

My Department has been working closely with RBKC throughout to provide the support and challenge necessary to drive this work. I am pleased to see, from the taskforce's second report, that some important progress has been made. RBKC, alongside the Government, has put in significant resources and increased its efforts to provide those affected with greater clarity about the support that is available to them. We have also seen a stronger focus on implementing new ways of working to drive much needed cultural change across the council in collaboration with external stakeholders, and a greater candour about the improvements that still need to be made. But there is much more to do to ensure that residents can see and feel that things are getting better on the ground. Nowhere is this more important than the vital task of rehousing those who lost their homes—a task that I have always been clear must be sensitive to individual needs, but must not use these needs as an excuse to justify any type of delay.

Five months on from the fire, at the time of the taskforce's first report, 122 households out of a total of 204 had accepted an offer of temporary or permanent

accommodation. Only 73 households had moved in, and only 26 of those had moved into permanent homes. Today I can report that 188 households have accepted an offer of accommodation. Just over two thirds of these—128 households—have already moved into new accommodation, including 62 into permanent homes. This is welcome news but, as the taskforce's second report highlights, progress has been far too slow.

It was always going to be a challenge to respond to an unprecedented tragedy on this scale and to secure new accommodation in one of the country's most expensive locations, but progress has not been made as quickly as it should have been. There are still 82 households in emergency accommodation, including 15 in serviced apartments, with 25 families and 39 children among them. This is totally unacceptable. The suffering that these families have already endured is unimaginable. Living for this long in hotels can only make the process of grieving and recovery even harder. As the taskforce has said, it is unlikely that all households will be permanently rehoused by the one-year anniversary of the fire. This is clearly not good enough. I had hoped to have seen much more progress. It is very understandable that the people of North Kensington will feel disappointed and let down, even if there are encouraging signs that the pace of rehousing is speeding up.

The council now has over 300 properties that are available to those who lost their homes, so each household can now choose a good quality property that meets their needs, with the option of staying in the area if that is what they wish. To ensure that these homes are taken up, I expect all households, regardless of their level of engagement, to be given whatever support they require to be rehoused as quickly as possible. The Government will continue to play their part, providing help with rehousing and other support for survivors, including financial support currently worth more than £72 million. The weeks ahead will be critical for ensuring that efforts to rehouse survivors go up a gear. I will be closely monitoring progress and will of course keep the House updated.

As I said earlier, if the council is to regain trust it is paramount that the Grenfell community is not just being told that things are changing, but can see that its views and concerns are being heard and acted on. A good example of this, as highlighted by the report, is the transfer of responsibilities from the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation to RBKC on an interim basis. This happened after residents made it clear that the tenant management organisation could no longer have a role, not only on the Lancaster West estate but more widely in housing management throughout the borough.

Residents have been engaged in the process of refurbishing the Lancaster West estate, with the Government matching the £15 million that the council is investing in this programme. Alongside this, the council will shortly be consulting residents on the long-term delivery of housing management needs across the borough. The voices and needs of the residents will also be at the heart of the process to determine the future of the Grenfell site and the public inquiry, which has just begun its second procedural hearing.

There must be an even stronger focus on needs as we step up efforts not just to rehouse survivors, but to help them to rebuild their lives and, vitally, to rebuild trust.

[Sajid Javid]

It is a process that will clearly take time and unstinting commitment on all sides. As the taskforce has noted, some progress has been made, but there is no room for complacency. I expect the council to take on board the taskforce's recommendations and do more to listen to the community, improve links with the voluntary sector and act on feedback that it gets from those on the frontline.

I thank the members of the taskforce once again for their valuable contribution, which will continue for as long as it is needed. As they have noted, despite the many challenges, there is

"a level of community spirit and attachment not often seen in local communities in London".

It is a dynamic and diverse community spirit made stronger during the darkest of days—a spirit that is determined to secure a brighter future for the people of North Kensington. We share that determination and will continue to work with the bereaved, survivors and others. I commend this statement to the House.

11.39 am

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for an advance copy of his statement.

Anybody who has dealt with people who have gone through this kind of tragedy is bound to have compassion and real empathy, and the Secretary of State is absolutely right to demand that from all the agencies involved. However, what has been absolutely lacking is the fire and zeal that that compassion and empathy should have delivered, both in the Secretary of State's office and in the local authority that has so abysmally failed the survivors of Grenfell Tower.

We are now nine months on from this tragedy. Two hundred and nine families needed rehousing. Had the Secretary of State come to the House at the very beginning of this process and told us that, nine months on, only 62 of those families would have been permanently rehoused, he would have been laughed out of this Chamber, and rightly so.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Mrs Heather Wheeler): It's their choice.

Tony Lloyd: The hon. Lady mutters, "It's their choice." If we offer people a decent choice, they will move into the permanent homes they want. Nobody wants to be in emergency accommodation with their children. Eighty-two families are in emergency accommodation. This is a shameful record, nine months on.

In December, the Secretary of State told the House:

"I have been very clear with the council that I expect it to do whatever is necessary to help people into suitable homes as swiftly as possible. I am confident that the council is capable of that".—*[Official Report, 18 December 2017; Vol. 633, c. 773.]*

Frankly, none of us can have confidence in this council. It has continued the litany of failure that it began those nine months ago, and indeed before, in the lead-up to the tragedy. When the Secretary of State's promise that everyone would be rehoused within the year prior to the anniversary of the tragedy gave some hope to the survivors of Grenfell Tower. He has abysmally failed in that promise.

He now has to say what he intends to do to make sure that he can give a reasonable timescale that gives reasonable hope to the many people who are still waiting for some good news out of the tragedy those nine months ago. I have to ask him a serious question: does he really have confidence in the council to deliver? If so, that confidence has so far been sadly misplaced. At what point will he step up and take responsibility, given that ultimately he is the Secretary of State with responsibility for housing and for relations with that failing council? Both for the nation as a whole and for the survivors of Grenfell Tower, it is time to see legitimate progress. This is simply not an acceptable record.

I turn now to some of the wider issues where we are still waiting for answers. The Secretary of State has been asked about the timescale with regard to the other local authority tower blocks. Only seven of the 300-plus tower blocks that were identified as having combustible material and as not meeting modern-day building regulations have been re-clad. When can he give us some sense of progress where we can see some real change taking place? He has legitimately made the point that at each of those affected blocks there are, for example, fire marshals to ensure public safety. That is a sensible precaution, but obviously what is really sensible is making sure that re-cladding is delivered where appropriate. In that context, he still has not answered the question as to when he will respond to the 41 local authorities that have asked for financial assistance to complete that task. I hope he can give us some idea of when progress will take place.

I have to raise again with the Secretary of State the question of private tower blocks. It is quite clear that the Government simply do not know which private blocks are affected, potentially putting their residents and tenants at risk. Of course, if we do not know which blocks have combustible material, that means that we do not know whether they have the fire marshals and alternative precautions that will keep people safe, at least on a temporary basis.

Last week the Secretary of State came to the House to tell us about the failure of the fire doors at Grenfell. I understand that, of the fire door samples tested this week, at least one of the three that failed came from blocks other than Grenfell Tower, which means that there is still a risk out there. Can the Secretary of State satisfy us that he knows where those defective doors are? That information needs to be put in the public domain and we need to do something about it.

Finally, developers are still building and they need to know when and how they can do so in a way consistent with public safety. We are not there yet. Nine months on from the tragedy, there has been a failure to protect the interests of the survivors of Grenfell Tower; a failure to ensure that structures are in place to guarantee that other tower blocks can be declared safe; and a failure to ensure that we can face the future in the knowledge that developers are building in a way consistent with public safety. The Secretary of State has to give certainty to the people who deserve it. This is not about Members in this Chamber or even the people of this country in general. The survivors of Grenfell Tower deserve an awful lot better, and he has to stand up and take responsibility.

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, and I am happy to respond to the points he raised.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to question, as the taskforce has done in its second report, the speed of rehousing. However, it is appropriate to remind the House that, right from the start, the intention of the council and everyone involved is, rightly, to treat every individual as just that—an individual. If the objective from day one had been to get people out of hotels and into homes without listening to their needs, that clearly would have been wrong. It has been right at every step to work with each one of the households affected. For example, when numerous households said that they would like to take the opportunity to split, particularly if they had different generations in homes, we listened to them. There were 151 homes lost in the fire, but 208 households need to be rehoused because the council rightly listened to the needs of the families.

I will not go through all the numbers, but of the 208 households who need rehousing, 22 have not accepted any offer of temporary or permanent accommodation, despite the fact that more than 300 properties of all different sizes and in different locations are now available for those families. There are 22 who have yet to accept an offer. I hope the hon. Gentleman understands that many of those families are still very traumatised and that some are not in a position to even want to make a decision about leaving the hotel. I hope he agrees that in such situations no family should be forced into accommodation they are not comfortable with. However, I accept his wider point about treating the issue with the urgency it deserves, which is why I hope that when the council responds to the taskforce report, it will accept all its recommendations on rehousing and all the other issues.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I have confidence in the council. Yes, I do have confidence in the council. I would like to see more. I agree with the taskforce recommendations. I still feel that it was right to intervene when I did and to have the taskforce go in and provide scrutiny.

On the building safety programme, we believe that there are 301 tall residential towers over 18 metres high whose ACM cladding does not meet building regulations. Immediate interim measures have been taken in every single one of those buildings, to ensure that the residents feel safe. All those measures have been taken in consultation with the local fire service, to make sure that there is proper expert advice, and it is accepted that they are appropriate measures. Of those buildings, 130 are in the private sector. Local authorities are the primary bodies responsible for seeing whether there are any more such buildings in the private sector in their respective areas. We have provided them with a tremendous amount of support, including an additional £1 million, which we recently released at their request, and we continue to work with them. Of the 158 buildings in the social sector, remediation work has begun on 92 of them—58%—and the work has been completed on seven.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman respects the fact that, once a building has been identified, it takes time to take down the cladding and replace it appropriately, but we are supporting local authorities in doing that work, including where they need financial flexibility and support. We have been approached by 41 local authorities so far. Interestingly, only 13 of those 41 authorities have reported that they have residential towers with ACM cladding that they are trying to remedy. Understandably, however,

other issues have come up, such as a demand for sprinklers and other forms of action. In each of those cases, we have said to the local authorities that it is right for them to determine, with professional advice, what essential work they need to do, and we will work with them on financial flexibilities if that is required.

The hon. Gentleman asked about fire doors, and that work continues. As he knows, we are working with the independent expert panel, the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Government's scientific advisers. There has been testing, including visual inspections, and the testing in labs continues. The independent experts are still advising us that there is a low risk to public safety—at this point, they feel that there is no systemic risk—but their work continues, as does the assessment work.

Lastly, the hon. Gentleman asked about building regulations. He rightly said that developments of course continue as we speak, and we need to make sure that there is full confidence in the building regulations system. That is exactly why a report is being prepared independently by Dame Judith Hackitt. All the recommendations in her interim report have been accepted, and each of them is being implemented. We await her final report, which I think will bring much more clarity to this area.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his very important statement. Will he confirm that interim safety measures have been taken for all social housing blocks with unsuitable cladding, and that in the majority of cases the remediation work has already begun?

Sajid Javid: Yes, I am very happy to confirm that to my hon. Friend. In every single case in which tall residential buildings have been identified with ACM cladding that we believe does not meet building regulations, interim safety measures have been taken, and work has begun on a majority of social buildings.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I first want to put on record my thanks to firefighters. A fire is currently raging through commercial premises on Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow, and it is right to pay tribute to firefighters who run towards burning buildings and put themselves very much at risk every day. That is of course what happened yesterday at the Metro Hotel in Dublin, so we should put our thanks on the record.

I appreciate what the Secretary of State says about the ongoing work on fire-door risk. I wish to put on record that Scottish Minister Kevin Stewart has said that, with our post-2005 building regulations, none of the type in question has been installed in Scotland. Will the Secretary of State tell us a wee bit more about the ongoing work to establish the extent of the use of problematic fire doors in the rest of the UK? I have concerns about the fact that we started off with cladding and have now moved on to fire doors. What are we doing to identify comprehensively the risks for people in all kinds of buildings who want to be able to go home at night feeling safe about where they live?

What is being done to identify support for people in private sector buildings who are now having to find the cost of replacing cladding on their buildings, even though they had no idea it would be a problem when they moved in? That affects some Glasgow residents—not in my constituency, but in the Glasgow Harbour development.

[Alison Thewliss]

They need a bit of reassurance about what can be done to help them to pay for work on their building that they did not anticipate and could not have anticipated when they moved in. It will not be the only building across the UK to be affected in that way.

Lastly, I want to hear a wee bit more from the Secretary of State about future action. The Scottish Housing Minister, Kevin Stewart, announced on 18 March that amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 will be brought forward to cover all homes. Under the amendments, at least one smoke alarm will be installed in the main living room and there will be at least one in the main circulation space, and there will be at least one heat alarm in every kitchen. Those alarms will be ceiling-mounted and interlinked. He is also looking at hardwiring issues, the age of smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors.

It is clear to me that there must be a comprehensive approach so that regardless of the type of house people live in or the type of ownership—whether people own their own house, or live in a social rented or private rented house—we all have an equal standard of protection and we can all expect to remain safe in our own homes.

Sajid Javid: I join the hon. Lady in commending the work of firefighters throughout the UK and everything they do to keep us safe. The work on fire doors continues, led by the expert panel and the National Fire Chiefs Council, and further tests are being carried out. I hope that the hon. Lady appreciates that such work requires finding doors that are currently installed and belong to private families, and then working with them to take those doors away and replace them. That will happen at the same time as testing them, but the testing continues apace. We are sharing the information gathered with officials in devolved authorities, and rightly so.

The hon. Lady asks about the private sector, particularly about leaseholders who live in towers with ACM cladding. There are many such cases, and more have come to light in recent days, including in Scotland. The Scottish Government are free to take action if they want to help those leaseholders in any way, and we continue to work with many builders and freeholders. I believe that leaseholders have no responsibility for what has happened; where possible, I want builders and freeholders to take more responsibility. I plan to convene a roundtable with freeholders and builders to consider what more we can do, and to keep the situation under review.

Finally, the hon. Lady spoke about the action that is being taken in Scotland on smoke alarms and other fire safety measures, and of course that is for the Scottish Government. I agree that all such things must be reviewed in the light of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and that is exactly why Dame Judith Hackitt's independent review is taking place.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for his work on this. His expression of financial flexibility may be available to councils, but it is not available to private leaseholders.

Will my right hon. Friend break with the habits of his predecessors and, when he holds his roundtable, not just invite freeholders and managing agents, but include the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership? It has probably

done as much as, if not more than, the Leasehold Advisory Service, and it is capable of providing rather better advice than just saying, "Go to a legal pro bono unit." The Secretary of State has the opportunity to bring everyone together.

Sajid Javid: I am happy to take my hon. Friend's advice on board and to include the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership.

Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) (Lab): I will be reading the taskforce report in great detail. I am confused by the figures cited by the Secretary of State, because we have completely different ones. In November we were told that there were 209 displaced households, but I had the true figure from the council's housing department, which was 376. Those figures then go through the mediacom department, where they are put on hot wash and spin. We have 200 displaced people—75 households—on our books in my constituency office, and a lot of people do not necessarily come to us. There is a total mismatch with the figures. We were originally told that the number of displaced people who had been made homeless by the fire was 863, so the figures have been washed—let us put it like that. There were more than 200 children in bed and breakfasts. That figure has clearly gone down, but I estimate that there must be still around 100, and their human rights are being breached.

As to the 300 fabulous properties, I have been told that they are not suitable. I deal with people every week—I am sure that the Secretary of State does, too—who say that these are not suitable properties. A lot of people have been shown nothing that suits their needs whatever. I have heard three cases of people being asked to put the elder members of their family into care so that they can be rehoused. That is an absolute disgrace when people want to look after their families themselves. I have been told by estate agents that some of those 300 properties are being sold back on to the market at a loss, because nobody wants them, so there are not 300 suitable properties.

Just this week, I was contacted by two single parents who were made homeless by Grenfell. One is self-harming, but not receiving any help. The other was placed in temporary accommodation that was riddled with black mould and demanded that the council move the family. That was completely ignored until a volunteer put it up on Twitter—it was picked up by the council via Twitter. I am absolutely disgusted, as the Secretary of State may gather. Social housing is—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I appreciate that the hon. Lady has some very important points to make and I appreciate her deep involvement in this subject, but she is not making a speech. She is asking a question of the Secretary of State; we do not need commentary. I am not going to stop her, because I appreciate that she has important questions to ask, and the Secretary of State will be able to answer them, but, please, just the questions.

Emma Dent Coad: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I believe that the truth is being censored and people are demanding to know why. Trust in the council is being eroded. Will the Secretary of State explain why there is a mismatch in the figures? A lot of residents are

asking for commissioners to be sent in to deal with rehousing specifically. Will the Secretary of State stand by, because finger-wagging is not enough? I would be grateful to hear his response.

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments and questions, but may I first say to her that, with respect, I think she is a bit confused about the numbers? For example, when she refers to households that need rehousing, I think that she is confusing individuals with households. She is confusing residents of Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk with residents of the wider estate. She is also confused on the number of properties available. She made comments about the quality of properties. Rather than just talking about the quality of properties, I invite her to actually investigate by going to see some of those properties.

The hon. Lady talks about the truth and suggests that the truth is not out there. That is a very unhelpful comment, if I may say so, for the people who have been affected by this tragedy. She should be seeking to provide them with information and facts. She should respect that this is a report from an independent taskforce: it is not from the Government; it is not from the council. The taskforce meets members of the community regularly to do its work and it is completely independent. I hope that she can come to respect the work of the taskforce and see what it is doing. I would be very happy to write to her in more detail, especially on the numbers issue.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, for his admission that things were not right at the start, and for his commitment to putting them right. He mentioned the interim review into building regulations and fire safety. In correspondence with the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Dame Judith Hackitt accepted that the lowest-risk option, which is not in her review, is a simple requirement for insulation and cladding to be of limited or no combustibility. Does the Secretary of State not agree that we must now adopt the lowest-risk option if we do not want this kind of tragedy ever to happen again?

Sajid Javid: I thank my hon. Friend for the interest he has taken in this issue ever since the tragedy, as well as for his work on the Select Committee. He makes a good point about some of the types of changes that could be made. It would be wrong of me to pre-empt the outcome of Dame Judith Hackitt's inquiry, but I have listened very carefully to what my hon. Friend has said.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Today we learned that there has been a 64% rise in the number of families in temporary accommodation since 2010. We know that emergency and temporary accommodation is expensive, insecure and often of bad quality. Local authorities simply cannot cope alone. If this is bad for families generally, it is of course catastrophic for families who have been through the trauma of Grenfell, so why did the Secretary of State allow his Department to hand back £800 million to the Treasury?

Sajid Javid: I say gently to the hon. Lady that today we learned there has actually been a sharp fall in statutory homelessness, when we compare the last quarter with the same quarter in the previous year. I would have

thought that she would welcome that. She talks about handing money back. Perhaps she would like to ask the Mayor of London why the Greater London Authority, under his control, handed back more than £60 million.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): It is reassuring that the council is making improvements and responding to the problems that have been exposed. It is important, too, that the Government continue to listen to the survivors and victims' families. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government are speaking to victims groups and say how they are engaging?

Sajid Javid: Yes, I can absolutely confirm that to my hon. Friend, such work is being done not just by the council, but by the voluntary groups it has commissioned to provide support and build an extra level of trust. I can also confirm that members of the taskforce, whom I met yesterday, have engaged extensively with the community and will continue to do so.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The stand-out figure in the Secretary of State's statement was the 82 households in emergency accommodation. Some of those people are in my constituency, and I know the hotels they are in. They are budget hotels that might be great for one or two nights for two people staying in London, but it is absolutely intolerable for a family to be in those conditions for nine months, particularly if they are traumatised. The Secretary of State should go back to his office and immediately put in place steps to ensure that those families are moved into accommodation. It is not acceptable for him to say, "We are going at the pace the residents want." Kensington and Chelsea is not up to this job. He has to intervene. The Government must be able to ensure that those 82 families are properly housed within days, not another nine months.

Sajid Javid: The vast majority of the 82 families have already accepted offers of permanent and temporary accommodation. The main reason why many have not moved from their hotels, having accepted an offer, is that, rightly, they have been asked what furniture and decoration they would like. It is right that that process is carried out. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that people should be forcibly moved out of hotels, he is clearly wrong. He should treat these individuals as people, not statistics.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Nine months on from the Grenfell Tower fire, we still do not know how many private blocks have the Grenfell-style cladding. To date, Wandsworth Council has still not provided or published this information. Why is this happening? Will the Secretary of State commit today to pressing councils such as Wandsworth to hurry up and get on with the job of publishing the information?

Sajid Javid: I am happy to share the latest figures with the hon. Lady: 130 private sector residential blocks over 18 metres high have ACM cladding, and that obviously covers several councils—more than 10 local authority areas, I think. She asked about Wandsworth Council. If she can tell me exactly what information she would like, I will be happy to approach Wandsworth Council on her behalf.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): We have all experienced tragedies in our constituencies involving fatal fires caused by such things as chip pans and too many plugs in sockets. Education plays an important role, so to what extent is the Secretary of State liaising with the Department for Education to make sure that people are trained up on what they can do in their homes to reduce the risk of fire?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. In the light of this terrible tragedy, it is important that we look across Government at the role that every Department has to play. Of course the work has rightly started with building regulations and fire safety rules in buildings, but it is important that we also take forward the issue of education, and I would be happy to speak to my colleagues in the Department for Education.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): The Secretary of State said that of the 188 households that had accepted offers of accommodation, only 62 were in permanent homes. Does he agree that local authorities need to be given more powers and financial support to enable the building of new council properties so that more permanent homes can be made available for those in need?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman asks a wider question about council houses and support for council house building, and I agree with his point. Ambitious local authorities want to build more council houses to help their local communities to get support. That is why I am pleased that, at the last Budget, the Chancellor announced additional support.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): I welcome the Secretary of State's important statement. According to the Metropolitan police, the Grenfell fire was, as we all know, caused by a faulty electrical appliance. Rates for electrical product recalls currently sit at around only

20%, leaving millions of potentially dangerous appliances in homes nationwide. What are the Government doing to implement product recall as a matter of urgency?

Sajid Javid: Ever since this terrible tragedy, my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has been looking at this issue. The hon. Gentleman will know that certain criteria have to be in place before a product recall can happen, and I know that, in the light of this tragedy, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is looking at this again.

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State spoke earlier about the need for more empathy and emotional intelligence, but he has shown precious little of that towards the tens of thousands of people across the country who are still living in residential blocks that are covered in flammable, Grenfell-style cladding. There is no point in him pointing the finger at developers and builders, because nobody has yet shown any legal basis under which they can be made to pay, so if the Government do not act, the cladding stays up and we risk a second Grenfell Tower. When will he stop talking, start acting and make these people's homes safe by taking that cladding down?

Sajid Javid: The first point to emphasise for everyone in that situation, including the hon. Gentleman's constituents, is that their buildings are not unsafe. That is a result of the interim measures that have been implemented, including with regard to fire wardens. It would be wrong unnecessarily to make people worry that they are living in unsafe buildings, because measures have been taken. He is right to point to the longer-term action that is needed. He talks about legal responsibilities, but there is also a moral responsibility, and that has worked in some cases. I think that there will be more cases in which builders and freeholders step up but, as I have told him before, we are reviewing the situation and looking at what more can be done.

Point of Order

12.12 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Have you been informed whether the Home Secretary proposes to come to this House to make a statement about the awarding of the British passport contract to the French-owned company, Gemalto? It is of great importance to people in my constituency of Blaydon and, I understand, in yours of Epping Forest.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): It is unusual for the occupant of the Chair to say with absolute honesty, “I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point of order. If I were not in the Chair, I would have been tempted to make it myself,” but it is probably not in order for me to say that. I will now rebuke myself and answer the hon. Lady by saying that I understand perfectly why she has raised the matter on the Floor of the House. It is of great importance in her constituency, in mine and in those of several other Members. While I have not had any indication from the Home Secretary or any of her Ministers that they wish to come to the House to deal with it, I am sure that they will have heard, or will soon hear, of the hon. Lady’s point of order. Let us hope that in due course the Ministers responsible will come to the House about this matter.

The Economy

12.14 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the economy.

Today is a good opportunity to reflect on the economic news we have seen this week—the best deficit numbers in 10 years and record employment—and on the Government’s economic strategy over the past eight years and why it has succeeded. It is incredible to think that 10 years ago, we were witnessing the collapse of Northern Rock, and we were in crisis. We saw bankers leaving their buildings, such as that of Lehman Brothers, with boxes, and we were worried about the safety of our bank accounts and our personal finances. We were worried about whether we would have jobs, but here we are 10 years later seeing the positive signs of an economy that has recovered. As Amy Winehouse sang, we are now getting “back to black”.

We are seeing positive news across the board—so positive that even the Chancellor is Tiggerish, although there are still some Eeyores on the Opposition Benches. GDP has grown for five years straight. Employment is at record levels. Manufacturing has seen the longest consecutive period of growth for 50 years. We have had the two strongest quarters of productivity growth since before the financial crisis. When I travel around the country to see what is happening around the UK, there is excitement. In Liverpool, we have the new Superport. More goods are being traded through that great trading city than at any time in its history. In Cardiff, we have one of the fastest-growing economies in the UK. In Bristol, investment is being attracted from Silicon Valley into tech start-ups. In East Anglia, the food capital of Britain, we have seen exports go up by 10% in the past year alone.

We should not take this progress for granted, however, because we did not get here by accident. We have reached this turning point only because the Government have had a sound economic policy—a policy that the Opposition have opposed at every turn. I want today to lay out the elements of our approach: first, the supply side reforms that have unleashed business and people to succeed; secondly, our fiscal policies that are getting our country back in shape; and thirdly, our macro-prudential and monetary policies that have made sure that people can rely on their finances and have vital financial security.

We know that successful economies are ones that give businesses and people the freedom to succeed—to enable them to reach their potential and to offer what they have to the country. We have reformed our benefits system, our education system and our employment laws, so that people can have those opportunities. We now have record numbers of young people studying maths and science and going on to university. We are getting more people into apprenticeships and are seeing more young people in employment, whereas under Labour, 1.4 million people were left on the scrapheap. It left government with youth unemployment rising. We have one of the best records on youth unemployment in Europe, and we are giving young people opportunities. We have helped companies by lowering corporate taxes and keeping them low, and we have made it easier for

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them to take on staff, because we know that the risk takers and ideas makers drive forward Britain's economy in the robust discipline of the free market. That philosophy is encapsulated in our industrial strategy.

Labour has no idea what makes Britain successful. Its approach is to try to close down the new economy. The hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) wants to restrict Airbnb. Labour authorities are trying to close down Uber, but all these opportunities help the most marginalised in our economy. Two thirds of all those renting out Airbnb apartments are women, helping them to earn vital income for their budgets.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I thank the Cabinet Secretary for giving way. The point about Airbnb is certainly well made. Airbnb does help to underpin the economy of the remote parts of the highlands—there is no two ways about it. This is not an anti-Government or an anti-Labour party point, but the Cabinet Secretary will realise that there are structural issues in constituencies such as mine. We have the long-term rundown of Dounreay, which is a nuclear site. How do we secure replacement employment for that? Of course, the depressed price of oil speaks for itself, and I see the number of drill platforms that are parked up in the Cromarty Firth. I do not want to appear an Eeyore—I try to look at myself as more of a Tigger than an Eeyore—but some deeper problems cross the divide in the colour of Governments, and those are the sorts of things we need to tackle.

Elizabeth Truss: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for referring to me as the Cabinet Secretary. I have to tell him that I am not that powerful.

I appreciate that there are Tiggers on both sides of the House who are trying to see the good in what is happening in Britain. I think that there are opportunities to open up all parts of our country to new enterprise. We are, of course, doing what we can to help the oil and gas industry, but we also need to look for new sources of ideas and income.

At the same time as trying to close down the new economy around our country, Labour is trying to take over the old economy. Labour Members believe that it would be better for companies to be run by the Government rather than being allowed to run themselves. Even for companies that they think should remain in the private sector, they want to set up a £350 billion strategic investment board to decide where those companies' investments should be. That would constitute an unprecedented encroachment by a Government into the business of enterprise and freedom. I find it hard to believe that Labour Members could run anything, given their inability to run their own party.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): For many years, the UK has been seen as a desirable place in which to hide suspicious wealth. Can the Minister explain why the Government have so far done relatively little to discourage that activity?

Elizabeth Truss: We have introduced more than 100 measures to improve transparency. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that our finances are transparent and that private as well as public enterprise runs in a transparent fashion.

I want to draw Labour Members' attention to the huge strides that we have seen in terms of better prices and better customer services, thanks to the privatisation programmes of the 1980s and 1990s.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does the Chief Secretary share my pleasure at the way in which the economy has confounded the excessively pessimistic forecasts of the last Chancellor for the short-term impact of the Brexit vote? Will she and her ministerial colleagues ensure that the standard of Treasury forecasting is lifted, so that in future we do not see excessive and unrealistic pessimism?

Elizabeth Truss: Like my right hon. Friend, I am delighted by how well our economy is doing and how resilient it has been to all kinds of events. As for forecasts, they are simply forecasts. We believe that with the right approach, by liberating businesses and people, we can outperform our forecasts, and that is what we must seek to do.

I was talking about the privatisations of the 1980s and 1990s. What we saw then was more competition, more investment and better management of money and our utilities. Water customers, for example, are now five times less likely to suffer from supply interruptions, eight times less likely to suffer from sewer flooding and 100 times less likely to be affected by low water pressure than they were when the industry was publicly owned. Investment has almost doubled following privatisation, and the average household bill is down by £130. In energy, the number and length of power cuts on local electricity networks has almost halved since 2002, and network costs are 17% lower than they were at the time of privatisation. There are now 66 players in the retail energy market, and the market share of the big six has fallen by 20%.

In the rail sector, the number of passenger journeys has doubled to 1.7 billion since privatisation.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): Spending on transport is 12 times greater in London than in Yorkshire, and that is having a negative impact on the growth of the economy in the north. Does the Chief Secretary think that is fair?

Elizabeth Truss: The figure that the hon. Lady has given is not correct. During the current spending review period, we are spending more per head on infrastructure in the north of England than in the south. In the longer term, there will be decisions to be made about which projects we fund in the north, but we are absolutely committed to ensuring that the north has its fair share of transport and infrastructure funding.

Since rail privatisation, the number of complaints has fallen by 75%, satisfaction has risen from 76% to 81%, and the days of waiting hours for a train and a stale sandwich from British Rail are long over.

Royal Mail was loss-making when it was in public ownership, sucking up resources that could have been spent on services such as the NHS. By contrast, it has been financially healthy in every year since privatisation. If Labour Members think that they could do a better job of running those services, they need to demonstrate how. On current form, I believe that their proposals would mean chaos and confusion, and if we include the

£350 billion for the strategic investment board, they would also mean the addition of an eye-watering half a trillion pounds of debt to the UK balance sheet.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech. Does she agree that the Government's approach is about practically achieving the best outcomes for people, whereas Labour's approach is ideologically driven and will lead the country into more debt and more borrowing?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Rather than giving people and businesses the ability to shape their own futures, Labour Members want to put power in the hands of vested interests such as the unions and big companies. They say that they want to get rid of the state aid rules. That would prevent competition from taking place properly, and the end result would be taxpayers, including small businesses and families, picking up the tab through higher taxes. Labour's plan would mean less money for schools and hospitals, and more money diverted to loss-making businesses.

The reality is that Labour still has not learnt the lessons of its failings in 2010. It has not learnt that a Government with no control over public finances will damage the economy and damage public services. When Labour left office, we were devoting 45% of our national income to public spending, and we have seen the longest increase in debt since the Napoleonic wars. Labour just does not understand that allowing the state to get too big cuts out individual enterprise. It cuts out people's incentive to take on risk, try new things and do new things. State-owned companies compete for space and resources with private companies, starving them of oxygen. What is worse is that what Labour is planning would have to be funded through higher taxes.

Under the last Labour Government, we saw public services that did not improve in terms of the outcomes for patients or students, but we also saw huge amounts of money squandered. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) is laughing. Is he laughing at the fact that in the international education league tables, the UK ended up 26th in mathematics? We saw no improvement, although vast amounts of money were squandered.

Through the fiscal discipline of the last eight years, we have reduced the deficit by three quarters to 2.3%, and we have reached the turning point of debt falling as a share of the economy in the coming financial years. Our efforts, needless to say, have been opposed at every turn by the Labour party, but they have restored confidence in our economy. They have boosted investment, and they have led to more jobs and growth. The Government's concrete plan to get debt down has given us a competitive advantage. If businesses know that we can keep our house in order, they will base themselves here in the UK, creating highly skilled and well-paid jobs.

At the same time, we have ensured that our public services are improving through public sector reforms such as the introduction of academies and free schools, and programmes that have put more people into work. We are seeing record cancer survival rates, better school results and record employment levels, because we have made the decision to reform the way in which our public services work. Because of our stewardship of the economy, we are now able to target Government spending where it is needed and where we recognise that there are issues.

Alongside our national retraining programme, we are tripling the number of fully qualified computer science teachers, so that our young people are able to succeed in the modern economy. We are increasing infrastructure spending on things like transport, which the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker) mentioned, to a 40-year high, even though we are having to make difficult decisions elsewhere. Yesterday we struck a deal to give nurses and other NHS staff a 6.5% pay rise over three years in exchange for reform that will improve patient outcomes, to make sure we can continue to recruit high-quality people in the NHS. We can do that only because we have got control of the public finances and we have fixed the economy, measures that Labour opposed at every turn.

So let me be clear: if we had listened to Labour and let the public finances spin out of control, there would be no money to invest in public services, and there would be no money now for that NHS deal, so nurses would not get their well-deserved pay rise. It is Labour that put public services at risk by losing control of spending and crashing the economy. Conservatives are delivering a stronger economy, stronger public services and a pay rise for hard-working NHS staff.

We are not out of the woods yet, however. Debt and borrowing are still too high. Debt is forecast to peak at 85.6% of GDP in 2017-18, the highest it has been for 50 years. That leaves us vulnerable to economic shocks in the future that are by their nature hard to predict, but—worst of all—it places a burden on the next generation, because we are still spending £50 billion a year on interest payments, more than the combined amount we spend on the police and armed forces. So in order to ensure the UK's economic resilience, improve sustainability and reduce the burden on future generations, we need to get our debt falling. However, even despite all these obvious facts that are all there in black and white, the Opposition continue to call for big spending announcements.

Bim Afolami: On debt interest repayments, will my right hon. Friend explain further how even a relatively modest rise in interest rates would make what is currently £50 billion of interest repayment completely unmanageable if Labour got in and we had a run on the pound?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and the reality is that the Opposition are planning for a run on the pound; they have actually released documentation that suggests that this is a real risk should they get into power. I find that incredibly worrying.

As I mentioned, the Opposition have called for big spending announcements. That is fiscal fantasy land, and there are only two ways it could be achieved. First, we could borrow more and plunge ourselves further into debt, making us less resilient to any potential shocks that might happen to the economy. Secondly, we could increase taxes, which would be bad news for families, bad news for businesses and bad news for the economy.

The Opposition claim that they could just increase taxes on the highest earners. That is simply not true. The levels of taxation they are talking about for their plans for a state on steroids would lead to the highest taxes we have seen in peacetime history, and the people who would really suffer are ordinary working people

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struggling to get by, and struggling to get on the housing ladder. Those are the people who would be hammered by Labour's tax increases.

Alongside our fiscal policy, we have a clear independent monetary policy and a macro prudential framework that has helped to bring inflation under control and promoted financial stability. We must remember what happens when the Government do not get this right: the banks had to be bailed out under the failure of Labour's tripartite regimes. Our reforms, which included establishing the Financial Policy Committee in the Bank of England, have made sure we have the sound financial institutions that people can rely on. In 2017 the Bank of England tested the financial system against a scenario that was more severe than the global financial crisis, and our system had the capital to cope. Our independent monetary policy regime has also kept control of inflation, which is set to fall this year, easing pressure on living standards.

Ten years ago we were on the brink: we were teetering on the edge of a very serious crash, and public spending was out of control. Over the past eight years, and as a result of the policy decisions we have taken, we have seen a huge growth in the number of new businesses opening in this country; we have got more people, particularly the young, into employment; and we have put our public services on a sustainable footing.

We are getting our public finances back to black. This week's economic news has been positive, but we are not complacent. We recognise that there is more work to do and we will continue to work hard to make sure our economy continues to grow, because as Britain prepares to leave the EU it is more important than ever that we unleash businesses and the people of Britain to fulfil their true potential.

12.35 pm

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): I do not know how the Chief Secretary managed to keep a straight face throughout that speech, and I am confused, too: listening to her, I thought I was in some sort of utopian democracy, but I am afraid it is completely not like that. It is a little over a week since the Chancellor stood up in the Chamber and delivered the first spring statement, proclaiming that there was light at the end of the tunnel, yet at the same time the Government have presided over the slowest recovery since the 1920s. The Chief Secretary did not mention that, so it is no surprise that for many people across this country her words rang hollow and untrue. The Tigger-like demeanour of the Chancellor and the back-slapping and self-congratulatory tone of his Cabinet colleagues, rather than reassuring an increasingly fearful public, reek of a complacency that betrays the poor state of the public finances and the challenges our economy faces.

The Chief Secretary referred to facts so let us have a few, because the facts do speak for themselves. Last year growth in the UK economy was the lowest in the G7 and the slowest since 2012. Inflation is the highest in the G7. Despite the marginal upward revisions last week, the Office for Budget Responsibility has revised forecast growth down in both 2021 and 2022, and growth is lower in every year of the forecast compared with March 2017. Those are a few facts I thought I would chuck in.

Meanwhile the economy, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, will now be 3% smaller in 2020-21 than was forecast just two years ago. Another fact: real wages have fallen every month in the last year and are lower today than they were in 2010. The OBR has said that it expects wages to remain subdued—an understatement if ever there was one—over the next five years, and the Resolution Foundation has gone further, arguing that the last decade has been the weakest for average earnings in two centuries after adjusting for inflation. So that is a strong economy, is it? It does not look very strong from where I and millions of other people sit.

Meanwhile, personal debt, which has risen to worryingly high levels, and stronger world growth are helping to keep the show on the road, masking just how useless the Government's economic policy is. The reality is that the Government's bluster and bravado are fooling no one, particularly at a time when their failed economic policies continue to harm the UK economy and not just the most vulnerable in society, but millions of people who are in work.

Whatever positive spin the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary want to put on it, this Conservative Government have missed every deficit target they have ever set. [Interruption.] It would be a lot better than under this Government; they have not really invested, and the investments they have made are pretty poor. Public sector borrowing is still higher than forecast a year ago, and public sector debt is over £700 billion higher than when the Conservatives came to power. This is hardly a record of economic competence, but is instead reflective of just how out of touch Ministers are. And may I remind the Chief Secretary that they supported all Labour's financial spending plans in 2007-08?

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman not find it a little ironic that he is criticising my colleagues on this side of the House when his own party's plans would plunge our country into even more debt, which we would be paying off for another two generations?

Peter Dowd: The hon. Gentleman is living on the same fantasy island as the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Outside the corridors of Whitehall and the Conservative cocktail parties, the reward for such a consistent record of failure in any job would be the boot. Instead, this divided and increasingly paralysed Government linger on, propped up by the Democratic Unionist party, with not much of a legislative agenda to speak of. It is almost like being on a zero-hours contract, which I know the Chief Secretary to the Treasury loves, while still being paid. It is clear that the Government are running scared. It is been seven weeks since the Public Bill Committee stage of the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill, yet there is still no sign of Ministers putting it before the House for its Report stage. They are frightened to death to come to the House on that matter. Instead, we have been subjected to the reckless and misinformed musings of the Transport Secretary, who has speculated that customs checks will simply not be enforced at the port of Dover. Similarly, Ministers have refused to bring back the Trade Bill, at a time when President Trump is on the verge of starting a trade war.

Bim Afolami: I want to take the hon. Gentleman up on his point about personal debt levels. Does he agree that it is because this Government's fiscal management has been so sensible—and recognised as such by the international markets—that interest rates have been kept low? This means that personal debt repayments are now lower on average than they were when the Labour party left office.

Peter Dowd: We lost our triple A rating under the hon. Gentleman's Government, so I do not think he has any room to point the finger at anyone.

While stressed-out doctors and teachers go to work every day, the Government duck responsibility and parliamentary scrutiny at every opportunity. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury might call these hard-working people “blobs”, but every day they run our health service and educate our children. Rather than spending her time attacking workers and the professional classes, the blob snob Chief Secretary should instead focus her attention on lifting the public sector pay right across the board and stepping up and taking action on our schools.

Elizabeth Truss: The point I was making was that, rather than supporting the vested interests, as the Opposition want to do, we want to get rid of state aid roles supporting the big companies and those who want to stop new people entering professions. I am on the side of people who have not got on the housing ladder or who have not entered a profession but who want to set up a new business. We want to deal with the vested interests that prevent that from happening.

Peter Dowd: I will tell the right hon. Lady what those professionals have: they have a vested interest in the health of our people, and in the health and education of our children. They have a vested interest in those people, unlike those on her side of the House.

Thelma Walker: Does my hon. Friend think that a massive increase in the use of food banks, homelessness and child poverty—and women's life expectancy going down for the first time since 1920—suggests that we have a healthy economy and a compassionate Government? I do not think so.

Peter Dowd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Those are yet more facts that the Government will not listen to.

The Chancellor has chosen to play things down, and he has desperately attempted to diminish the importance of his spring statement. He might have ditched the Red Box, but he has not ditched the plethora of problems facing this country. From social care to children's services, our public services are stretched to breaking point, and it is the most vulnerable people in our society, and working people, who are paying the price.

John Redwood: I note that only two Labour Back Benchers think that this is an important issue. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is an awful lot better to be living in the United Kingdom's economy today than it was in the last Labour year, when we had a banking crash and a great recession?

Peter Dowd: I remind the right hon. Gentleman of the document that he oversaw, “Freeing Britain to Compete”. In it, he proposed even more deregulation. He said at the time that if Labour regulated the banks

even more, they would be stealing all our money. Well, in effect, they did, because they had to have a £1.5 trillion bail-out, yet he wanted more deregulation. We are not going to sit here and listen to all this fantasy from the Government.

John Redwood: If the hon. Gentleman had read the whole report, he would have seen the clear warning that the banks did not have enough cash and capital. We said that they should have more.

Peter Dowd: I actually did read those turgid 300 pages. It was my penance to have to read that document. I will most probably get time off purgatory for that.

On the subject of children's services, the decision on free school meals is unforgivable. It was made by the Chancellor and his colleagues in the full knowledge that it would have a detrimental impact on people up and down this country who rely on those kinds of services. In relation to social care, no amount of kicking things into the long grass will make up for the inaction and indifference that the Chancellor has displayed.

Bambos Charalambous: Does my hon. Friend agree that, with one Tory council having gone bust and others forcing unprecedented cuts on local services, the Government are failing local government? Does he agree that the Chancellor has not funded local government finance properly, leading to suffering among the most vulnerable people?

Peter Dowd: Yes, and quite frankly, what the Government tend to do in these situations is stick their fingers in their ears. They do not want to hear these facts.

I know that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has been much more active, particularly on our trade deficit in regard to dairy products and the interests of cheesemakers. This has led her to extol the virtues of “unfeta-ed” markets on so many occasions that I have begun to feel that I “camembert” it any more. It has become increasingly clear that the Government's economic policy has more holes in it than a Swiss cheese. But there is a serious point here. During her seemingly endless public interventions, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury can only focus on a single theme. She has brought it back to us today, and I thank her for that. It is her belief that the state should continue to recede under permanent austerity. Schools, hospitals, social care, childcare, road maintenance, pollution standards and local government services more generally are all under the cosh, while her beloved market forces create new vape shops on every corner, and more misery.

Bim Afolami: To be more accurate, was not the Chief Secretary to the Treasury actually talking about a percentage of the total GDP of the state, and not the quantum amount? The heart of her argument was that if we continue to grow the economy as we are doing, we will have much more money for our public services. That was the real core of the point she was making.

Peter Dowd: Look, the reality is that the economy is not growing to the level it should be, because this Government are not investing in it. Actually, something like 50% of the growth in the economy is going to the most well-off 10%, and that is not reasonable. It is

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not fair. I ask the hon. Gentleman to bear those figures in mind. It is not simply a question of the growth in the economy; it is a question of where that growth goes and whether it is being shared out reasonably.

Luke Graham: Given that we are talking about growth figures, will the hon. Gentleman welcome the export boom in the north-west that has seen exports increase in the billions for Cumbria and Liverpool?

Peter Dowd: Of course, and I am glad that the Chief Secretary mentioned the port of Liverpool, which is actually in my constituency. She should have popped in for a cup of tea.

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman was not there.

Peter Dowd: I know; I was busy here. The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) makes a point about exports, but we have seen the biggest devaluation in the pound for as long as anyone can remember, and I suspect that that has had something to do with it. It is hardly down to the policies of the Government; it is an unexpected consequence.

Let us move on to something released today. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services yet again reports huge pressures on police forces, with emergency services responding not in seconds, minutes or even hours, but days. The "golden hour" is being stretched to up to a week—there is an achievement by this Government from a strong economy! It comes in the wake of the UK Statistics Authority having to correct the Prime Minister's imaginative—not a word that we often use in association with the Prime Minister—use of police funding figures. I cannot see much cause to celebrate the current state of the economy after eight years of Tory austerity.

Britain continues to have astonishingly low levels of productivity compared with other G7 countries, which is a direct result of this Government's failure to invest productively and proactively in the economy. Bizarrely, however, the Chief Secretary wants to celebrate—she did it again today—the poorly paid, precarious labour market that has fostered unproductive business models, which rely on exploitation instead of innovation and investment. For example, much of her Policy Exchange speech was spent singing the praises of Uber, as she did again today, but Uber's labour practices and poor track record on safety have made it the subject of an investigation by Transport for London. She sits in awe of some large corporations that use every opportunity to dodge their taxes. Yesterday, we heard about Facebook misusing people's personal data for profit. Is that the sort of country we want to live in? Of course it is not. Is that the sort of company that the Chief Secretary thinks is marvellous, wonderful and a model?

The Labour party embraces the opportunities of a fourth industrial revolution that empowers working people to take control of their own lives, yet the Conservative party wants to return to the practices of the first industrial revolution, when the world was dominated by the interests of the few. It is strange that the Chief Secretary talks about freedoms while advocating a society in which the broad mass of citizens are denied

basic rights. For example, how has the slashing of public services, while tax breaks are being handed to big corporations, made us freer? It has only trapped people in poverty and poor health.

Bim Afolami: The hon. Gentleman's speech illustrates the big dividing line between the two sides of the House. The Chief Secretary is concerned with people and consumers having access to high-quality, well-paying jobs and high-quality public services; the Opposition and the hon. Gentleman are obsessed with vested interests and the producers, many of which are not providing a good service to the British people.

Peter Dowd: Things are not going very well on that basis, but the bottom line is that that is the Tories' one-dimensional approach to things. Producers and consumers often interact. The person who works in the factory is a consumer and a producer. This goes to the heart of why the Tories just do not get it. They are the one-dimensional party.

The Government's entire economic strategy has been the transfer of private losses on to the public sector through austerity, using the state to pay for the losses built up by their donors. In other words, the Chief Secretary's free, lightly regulated markets have ended up costing us all a good deal, and she now wants to expand that even further at greater expense to us all. Her Government's economic strategy has left us buckling under huge national debt, with public services in crisis. It has left us with NHS trusts ending this financial year with a £1 billion deficit, and we have seen capital transfer to revenue for about the past four years, which is hardly the sign of a strong economy.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): I hate to go back to A. A. Milne, but I am hearing Eeyore all over the place. In the past half an hour, I have received news that Dura Composites in Clacton-on-Sea is going to start exporting to India. There is great news everywhere if we just look for it, but if the hon. Gentleman keeps talking things down, that will not do the country any good at all.

Peter Dowd: Well, I have been hearing a lot of "Pooh" today, quite frankly. I remind the House that, yes, Tigger was the one who bounced all over the place, but he also created inventions that always went wrong. That is what is going to happen here, so I ask Members to go and read about that.

The reality is that the economic strategy has left us with a Government who are trying to deprive 1 million children of a decent school dinner in the name of tough choices. In local government, it has left us with Conservative councils going bust, a 40% cut in early intervention to support families, the highest number of children taken into care since the 1980s, and 400 women seeking refuge being turned away because there were no places available for them last year. That is the reality of the Chief Secretary's vision of what she referred to as the Government's "success".

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): May I call on the hon. Gentleman, who is meant to be good at maths, to withdraw his statement about school dinners? Instead, will he confirm that following the debate and vote that

we held last week, we will give school dinners to 60,000 more children, including young Josh whom I met in my constituency last week?

Peter Dowd: The hon. Lady is quite simply wrong—it is as simple as that. That debate went on for a considerable period of time and the hon. Lady is wrong. Try telling that to the 4,000 affected families in my constituency! I will hear none of it.

Will the Chief Secretary to the Treasury tell me exactly how having fewer refuge places makes a woman trapped in domestic violence freer? How much freer are the unprecedented numbers of children being taken into care as a result of cuts to early intervention? Finally, how are children who are unable to concentrate at school, because they have not had a decent meal, more free to pursue their life chances? This tired nonsense, full of old chestnuts, continues to be peddled by this Government as a cover to disguise an economic strategy in tatters—[*Interruption.*] The right hon. Lady talks about rhetoric, but there is nothing rhetorical about cuts to the NHS, education services or universal credit. There are cuts right across the system. There is nothing rhetorical when somebody has to sleep on the streets. There is nothing rhetorical about having the largest number of rough sleepers.

The Conservative Government cannot face up to the fact that we are living in a country that is denuding its citizens of the services to which they are entitled. That is happening due to not our ideological views, but the Government's. Their lofty talk of abstract freedoms is an attempt to steer the conversation away from hard facts about who has paid the price of their failure: the poorly paid, precarious workers stuck in in-work poverty in one of the companies that the right hon. Lady hails in her speeches. Sixty per cent. of people in poverty now live in a working household. Does that indicate that the country has a strong economy? Millions are struggling to find a decent roof over their heads because of this Government's refusal to invest in the houses we need. They are the *mañana* Government. They will do it tomorrow or next week or the week after. It is a little bit like the police turning up next week or the week after when they were supposed to be here today. They will eventually get there—it is just like this Government's attitude to public services.

Disabled people have borne the brunt of austerity cuts by a Government who do not believe them when they say that they want to work but need more support. So have the 4 million people waiting on the NHS treatment list at the end of June. So have the thousands of our fellow citizens sleeping rough on Britain's streets—twice the number in 2010—in possibly the coldest weather we have experienced for a decade. To talk about abstract freedoms when the basic needs of citizens are not being met is at best folly and at worst an insult.

Thankfully, there is only so long that the Government can try to hide their failing economic policies behind abstractions before the citizens of this country elect a Government who stand for the rights to freedom and justice of the many, not just the privileged few. I note that the Minister talked about nationalisation. The Conservative party believes in public ownership, as long as that means other countries owning our public services.

1 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): This should be a serious debate, given that future generations will look back at the economic situation over the past decade, and to the political leadership that we have all given, and ask this generation, “What did you do to secure our economic future?” I am therefore pleased to be able to contribute.

As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said, 10 years ago this month, the last Labour Government introduced a Budget. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling, in his Budget speech in this Chamber, promised

“stability, now and in the future.”

He committed the then Government to

“maintain stability through the world economic slowdown.”

He proclaimed:

“Britain is better placed than other economies to withstand the slowdown in the global economy.”

He also forecast that

“the British economy will continue to grow throughout this year and beyond.”—[*Official Report*, 12 March 2008; Vol. 473, c. 285.]

That year's Budget committed to £43 billion of borrowing. The then Chancellor forecast that that would fall to £38 billion in 2009-10 and then continue to fall to £23 billion in 2012-13. What followed was the deepest recession in modern history, which hit Britain harder than most. Of course, it led to a sharp increase in unemployment, destroying the life chances of a generation of young people. As we know, borrowing did not fall, but rose to record levels, going on to add over £150 billion a year to the national debt—and that was when the moderates were in charge of the Labour party.

Since 2010, the responses of the Labour party to our Budgets and fiscal statements have moved further and further towards the hard left. Over the past year, we have heard the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Chancellor and other Members make reckless and irresponsible pledges and commitments. They fail to understand that the more we tax and borrow today—guess what?—the more that costs the country in the long term. Higher borrowing today means less money to invest in key frontline public services tomorrow. That approach to fiscal policy wiped more than 5% off the economy during the last downturn. The British public should be in no doubt of what that would mean for the long-term health of the economy, with more services starved of cash, and greater suffering when it comes to jobs, economic growth and prosperity.

This Government, through what was then our long-term economic plan, went out to reset the nation, and to support economic growth and investment. That growth and investment was possible, of course, as a result of very courageous decisions that led to unemployment falling, more young people in work than previously, and a record 32 million people in jobs. Growth has been steady and sustainable, and more businesses are being set up. Thanks to that economic plan, in my constituency there are 17% more enterprises than there were in 2010, and the claimant count is 70% lower than at its peak under Labour.

Let us not say that the job is done, however, because it is not. There is much more to do. The economic downturn created long-term damage to the public finances. It also led to something else that this generation of

[Priti Patel]

politicians must address: it damaged trust in politics. It threw open questions about the relationship between power and wealth throughout our society. There was a re-evaluation of the traditional economic models—monetary models, fiscal models and how we invest—but we have also seen quantitative easing, which has worked through the economy, making possible a new era of low borrowing costs and cheap debt, which has affected the burden of household debt.

We have a country with tensions between those who benefited from the boom years, whose assets have appreciated, and a generation under 40 who have effectively inherited a broken model of public finances and are now struggling for a secure prospect of owning assets and having a home of their own. That is why this Government need a radical economic vision—a challenge for us all—to really take the Conservative Government forward; to energise an economic revolution across our country that embraces freedom and opportunity; and to provide the next generation with the prospect of being able to provide for themselves, invest in housing, and hopefully raise a family as well—something which many of us have historically taken for granted, and which, of course, young generations want to do. They want to have the freedom to succeed. They want to have the economic freedoms that across the generations we have been able to take for granted.

People whom I meet day in, day out, tell me that they do not want a Government who tinker at the edges or the margins. They certainly do not want a Government who believe in the “nanny knows best” approach—centralisation and the command-and-control politics of the left. They want radical policies to tackle injustices in our country, to deal with the housing crisis, to promote genuine competition and choice in utilities, banking and other services, and also, importantly, to put families, consumers and entrepreneurs first. That means a coherent economic programme to tackle the underlying economic causes of the injustices that people feel today. It also means a more distinctive Conservative programme of economic reforms: opening up markets to new entrants; empowering consumers; setting free the power of technology and innovation; empowering local leaders across our communities; offering economic devolution across the country; accelerating housing and public transport investment; empowering and incentivising policies across the full spectrum of the public sector; and demonstrating leadership and reform alongside a skills revolution, a training revolution and education, supporting the practical impact of lifelong learning that future generations will experience.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary spoke about the inspirational political leadership in the 1980s that adopted a bold policy of redistributing economic power and opportunity, and putting it in the hands of the people, when Britain became a share-owning and property-owning democracy. Of course, it was Margaret Thatcher who led that economic revolution. I pay tribute not just to the former Prime Minister, but to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), who was one of the economic advisers at the time, for putting power back in the hands of consumers and the public.

We must always be radical and reforming in government: shaking up the status quo and empowering consumers; unleashing the power of technology and innovation; and opening up markets here and around the world to new entrants, and a new cycle of growth and prosperity. Now, more than ever, for future generations, it must be our national mission to lead a new wave of economic reforms that ensures that we keep taxes low for families and businesses, provide more choice in public services, put pupils and patients at the heart of our education and health services, and back more reforms to skills and training to ensure that school leavers do not just have opportunities but become the market makers of the future. We must ensure that people can upskill and retrain in later life to enable them to adapt to a changing, vibrant economy.

We also need to continue our programme that empowers Mayors and local councils with more powers and freedoms to retain the proceeds of local economic growth. Our economic strategy must drive growth. Infrastructure bonds and other financial measures can be used to invest in infrastructure and regeneration throughout the country, and that programme grows the economy through investment in the country's key strategic infrastructure, such as the great eastern main line, the west Anglia line, the A12 and the A120. We must ensure that we get Britain not just moving again, but accelerating in the 21st century.

We must be ambitious for British companies, both at home and abroad, and give dynamic innovators and wealth creators the freedom to succeed. Our economic freedoms matter, which is why this Government must continue to bang the drum for British businesses, of every shape and size, every minute of the day. British firms want to know that their Government are on their side no matter what, and that has to be at the heart of our economic strategy.

As well as focusing on our domestic reforms, in any debate about the economy we must look forward to our bright future as a free and independent nation when we leave the EU. Brexit should serve as a time of national renewal. We are seeing now more than ever—my right hon. Friend the Chancellor mentioned this in his statement last week—that this will be the start of the shaping of a new liberating chapter in our long history in which we will have many economic benefits. We will be a beacon for global free trade and pursue new trade and investment partnerships. My hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) has already mentioned new partnerships with India, and I hope that you will appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, that where Essex leads, the rest of the country will follow.

By the middle of this century, the EU's share of the global economy will fall below 10%. The old global economic order is being replaced by a new wave of economic powerhouses in Asia, Latin America and Africa. We are seeing change and we must ensure that we are at the front of the queue, leading that revolution of change, and that Britain is the first port of call for growing and newly emerging markets. As we reflect on the economy today, let us welcome not only the transformation, but the long-term economic stability that we have seen due to the macro and fiscal policies of this Government. I commend the Chancellor for his statement, but we must continue to be bold and ambitious for the future.

1.11 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): In coming to this general debate on the economy, I reflected on a couple of things. The first was that Papa Thewliss always told me that before I died I should do a night course in economics, and he was probably right, although he did not know at the time that I would end up here. I was also reflecting on my good friend Miriam Brett, a former employee of the Scottish National party group at Westminster, who took away some of the concerns I had about my right as a woman who did not know so much about these things to speak about the economy. She said, "Those guys who stand up and talk about figures all the time usually have no idea what they are talking about anyway. They just sound a bit impressive because they've got the figures in front of them." Taking the things she used to encourage me with, as well as some of the work the Women's Budget Group has produced over the years on the gender impact of the Budget, I thought a bit about who the economy is for and what it is for—is it about figures or people? Fundamentally, it is about people.

I put this question out last night to people on Twitter, half fearing what would come back, but I got some excellent contributions—all from women, as it happens—about their thoughts on the economy and how they fit within it. Lorraine Gillies said:

"It's about making decisions in a people before process way that enable people to achieve economic health. It's about spending to save."

That chimes clearly with the things I have heard from experts such as Sir Harry Burns, who talks about the importance of people having a sense of control over their lives. What I have seen in my three years in this place and in my eight years previously in Glasgow City Council is a decline in the amount of control people feel they have over their lives. They feel they are tiny cogs in a huge machine that does not recognise them, does not recognise what they have to contribute and does not recognise the skills they have. Instead, they are in a system that punishes them every day, in a range of different ways, whether through the welfare system, through the immigration system or just through the precarious nature of employment in these islands now. They feel that they do not have any say in this economy and that this economy does not work in any way for them.

We see that reflected in the figures that show wages stagnating and in the increasing difficulties young people find now as compared with the situation for the generations that came before me. Young people now cannot afford to buy a house; they find it more difficult even to rent a house in lots of places in the UK. They have insecure employment and insecure prospects. Some of them are very well qualified—far better qualified than young people have ever been—but they cannot get a say in the economy round about them.

Ministers and other Members have talked about the public finances, but as far as I can see these public finances are not to the public benefit—a lot of the time they are for private benefit. They are for companies and organisations, rather than for the people in the economy itself. Another woman, Fiona Brown, said:

"I'd like the economy to serve me, mine & the common weal. Currently we seem to be enslaved to it and the elites who remain the beneficiaries. FAIRNESS needed."

Fairness runs through a lot of the things the SNP has said on the economy in this place. We have seen banks bailed out while people have lost their jobs. We have seen banks closing their branches right across the country, yet the corporate executives are running away with lots and lots of money, their pockets stuffed full of the people's cash. We need to reflect on that when we see people so disenfranchised in the economy.

We also continually see loopholes. I see those in the complexity of the tax code, having sat through a couple of Finance Bill Committees. I have seen the huge complexities we are building in, layer upon layer, to the tax code in this country. That allows people to find other ways to manipulate money and take it away from where it should be: in the public coffers and being used for public good. We see things such as Scottish limited partnerships. My former colleague Roger Mullin has worked incredibly hard to bring these issues to light, as has the journalist David Leask and Richard Smith, the researcher and an expert on this issue. We have seen how money has been funnelled and hidden away and how we have no accountability over that money, who owns it, where it goes and what purposes it is used for at the end of that process. We have seen how this can involve Soviet oligarchs or various regimes in the world that want to hide their money. We need to get to a point where there is a lot more public accountability.

We facilitate these loopholes in the economy by allowing people to register a company at Companies House for just 12 quid and do none of the anti-money laundering requirements that would usually have to be done. This has to stop. The Government have to say, "If you want to register a company, that due diligence must be there." The UK Government cannot be turning a blind eye to companies that are ripping off people right around the world.

Some of the women who contacted me talked about the role of carers in our society. Lynn Williams said that the economy

"doesn't recognise or reward my unpaid care and those of us at the hard end of cuts do not benefit from growth...such as it is in Scotland or UK."

We can stand here and talk about growth figures and other economic figures, but if people out there on the street are not feeling that—if they are seeing prices going up and they are struggling every day to put food on the table—we are failing them and not recognising the difficulties they are going through.

The injustices continue. The Resolution Foundation says:

"The coming year (2018-19) is set to be the second biggest single year of welfare cuts since the crisis...at £2.5 billion".

That is £2.5 billion more in cuts, and they will affect people who have already found themselves losing out as a result of cuts. Welfare reform is rolling on and is damaging people who come to my surgeries and even those who do not come to my surgeries. I want to be able to help them, but they never make it through the door because they are so beaten down by the system. This is hitting families and disabled people the most. Figures just out from the Glasgow Centre for Population Health say that 24% of the working-age population in Glasgow have a disability that impacts on the work they can do. We need to think about that, because many of these people will want to work, but they find themselves trapped in a system that punishes them whichever way

[Alison Thewliss]

they go. It makes them feel as though they are being put upon for the very act of claiming something they are absolutely entitled to get; they are going through all this trauma again and again, proving to faceless bureaucrats that they have a right to something.

The Child Poverty Action Group says that child poverty has gone up three years running and that 67% of that child poverty is in families where the parents are working. That should shock us all, because those families are working damned hard every day to put food on the table. The constituents I see at my surgeries are working incredibly hard to try to put food on the table, but they cannot. Families come to me to ask me to get school uniforms and Christmas presents for their children because they cannot afford it. This is happening in 2018.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady is making a powerful speech about the impact that welfare reform is having on our economies. Does she agree that the other people who suffer are small retailers and providers, because the people who are not receiving that welfare support any more are not spending that money in small shops? It is estimated that in my constituency £83 million will be lost from our local economy through welfare changes alone, so lots of our small businesses will simply struggle to employ people in the future.

Alison Thewliss: Absolutely; it is well known that people will spend money in local shops and support the local economy. Welfare reform has had a similar impact in Glasgow. The welfare rights department of Glasgow City Council says that 636 households in Glasgow, where housing costs are relatively low, are affected by the benefit cap, and 94% of those households have children. The Government should know that they are taking food out of the mouths of bairns. That is what is happening, and they should be ashamed.

Ethnic minorities are affected as well. The Equality and Human Rights Commission report that came out last week highlighted that three quarters of the cuts to welfare benefits affect Pakistani families. The Government deny that they have done any such thing and do not regard that report as important, but it really is, because it is relevant to how people can be included in the economy. If people are having all agency and money taken away from them and the cuts disproportionately affect particular groups, the Government have a real problem on their hands. They have to acknowledge that.

There has been a significant impact on women. Engender has highlighted in its excellent reports how 86% of the cuts to welfare benefits have come from women's pockets. There are households in which women are not getting money and are not being able to put food on the table, as I have already outlined, and women have less capability in the world. That makes it far more difficult for women facing domestic violence to leave the situation, putting them in danger. It makes it far more difficult for women to achieve all the things that they could do in life and ruins women's potential. If women who have had children want to go back into the jobs market, it makes it far more difficult for them if they do not have the means to get by as they work their way back in.

I pay particular tribute to the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaigners across the country who see this at first hand. Those women have worked their whole lives, often in low-paid, strenuous jobs, lifting and shifting and moving people and goods around, only to see just as they approach retirement age—the goal that they were set to reach—the date move away from them in the cruellest possible way.

I wish to mention Rosemary Dickson in particular. Rosie is a stalwart WASPI campaigner in Glasgow. She was raised in Calton by a single mum. She started working at 15, while she was still at school, to get through her exams, and since then had always paid the big stamp. At 17, she moved into the NHS and qualified as a clinical perfusionist. She ran heart-lung bypass machines and was in organ retrieval teams. That job took its toll—it was very strenuous—and she retired. She is now 60 and cannot find employment. She has tried all different places—she even applied for a job with the Department for Work and Pensions, but was told she was not qualified enough. As advised by the Pensions Minister, she tried to get an apprenticeship, but was told that she was not qualified and that if she wanted to be trained, she would have to pay £2,000 to get the qualification. She is really struggling.

Rosie has seen her dreams of a happy retirement—of moving on to spend the retirement time that she wanted in the way that she wanted—fade. She may have to sell her house. Many women she knows now find themselves dependent on their husbands for the first time in their lives. It does not say very much for gender equality in 2018 that women who have worked their whole lives in jobs that made them work hard and paid them less now find themselves dependent on their husbands when they thought they would get some time and independence back for themselves. That is a stain on all our consciences.

I wish to mention the hugely valuable contribution that people who were not born in the UK make to our economy. They may be EU nationals or non-EU nationals, but so many of them make a tremendous effort and contribute hugely to our economy but have not seen that effort rewarded by the UK Government. I could list any number of immigration cases, although I see you indicating that you do not want me to, Madam Deputy Speaker. I see again and again people who have come here, worked, set up a business and employed native Glaswegians in that business, only to find that, for some small, technical reason with which the Home Office seems to have no flexibility to deal, they are no longer allowed to work or to get public funds. They are left absolutely high and dry with a family to feed, a house to pay for and bills to pay and—nothing. That is really cruel. These folk have so much to contribute to our economy, and we should thank them for their efforts. We owe them a great debt of gratitude for all that they have done for choosing to make Glasgow, Scotland and the UK their home.

I wish to raise the issue of those who have been caught out by paragraph 322.5 of the immigration rules. They made a legitimate change to their tax returns, sometimes years ago, and are now told, when they apply to regularise their status here, that they are a threat to national security under the discretionary powers of paragraph 322.5. It is absolutely ludicrous and I would be grateful if the Minister looked into the issue. We encourage people to make minor changes to their tax return—we do not

want people not to make changes to their tax return if they are due—but this group of people who have come here to work hard in highly skilled jobs and never taken a day's benefits or anything like that, now find themselves at risk of removal from this country under this discretionary rule. If people feel so unwelcome because of that, it will be a huge threat to the economy.

Finally, we need to talk about austerity. We have to look at its long-term impact on the nation's health and wellbeing and the knock-on effect on our economy, and we need to consider women's place in that. Women's Aid Northern Ireland told me that most women's equality issues are in fact economic, but wrongly get described as fluffy, marginal social quibbles. Caring work, which has propped up our economy since Adam Smith's ma fed and clothed him every day, is not counted as a valuable contribution to the UK's economic functionality. If we want to be a country that, as the Prime Minister says, works for everybody, we need to recognise what everybody brings to the country, and we need to make sure that people are rewarded properly.

1.26 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I have declared my business interests in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, but I do not plan to talk about them today.

What a catalogue of misery we heard from the Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). It was just bizarre. I thought there was an SNP Government in Scotland and that she might have found something about Scottish public services or the state of the Scottish economy of which she was proud, but no, everything is miserable and, of course, everything is the direct fault of the Westminster Parliament. The SNP takes no responsibility for anything. I thought the Scottish Government had put up taxes and were going to endow their public services with even more, but the hon. Lady did not mention that. Perhaps she does not like the potential economic consequences of that, but it is absolutely typical that we get nothing positive and the SNP accepts no responsibility for the economy.

I wish to talk about the huge opportunities for the United Kingdom economy as we leave the European Union. I know it is fashionable for Labour Members to be wholly negative about the Brexit for which their constituents voted and which—to try to keep their constituents' vote and have some confidence from their vote—they said in their 2017 manifesto they would deliver, but their voters, like me, think that there are huge opportunities for a United Kingdom that will be more prosperous and successful outside the European Union than inside it.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman says the SNP talk about misery; may I enlighten him with a little reality? This week, Dunnes Stores, an Irish company, announced that its store in the Parkhead Forge in my constituency was closing down. The company said that that is because of Brexit, and it will have a direct impact on jobs in my constituency. That is the reality.

John Redwood: I can find many examples of companies that have come pouring in with extra investment post the Brexit vote. The national figures show that we have had more jobs, investment and growth following that vote. Those ridiculously pessimistic Treasury forecasts

were launched just in time for the referendum vote. At the time, I and a few others put our professional reputations on the line, said that the forecasts were completely wrong, explained why the economics behind them was misleading and why the forecasts were likely to prove widely inaccurate. We were right; the Treasury, World Bank and others were comprehensively wrong and have been rightly confounded.

I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury agrees with me that it is a pleasure that those forecasts were wrong. She and the Chancellor are exactly right to be cautious about the latest set of official forecasts, which are likely to prove too pessimistic for the future years. It is important that we aim to beat those forecasts. We know that they keep changing the forecasts and that they tend to be too pessimistic, on average. Now is a good opportunity to go out and beat those forecasts. We should make that one of the main aims of our policy. I look forward to Opposition Members trying to help us, instead of doing all that they can to peddle misery and gloom to try to dampen spirits and reduce confidence at a time when there are good reasons to be more confident and to believe that those forecasts were wrong.

Let me take one obvious point. I have some disagreement with my Front-Bench colleagues, because I would like to stop paying any money to the European Union after March 2019. Some of my Front-Bench colleagues seem to wish to be more generous than me, but I think they agree that we must quite soon get to the point at which we are not paying any more money to the European Union. When we have full control of our money, which is what we voted for, we will have £12 billion to spend on our priorities here in the United Kingdom rather than on the European Union's priorities somewhere else across the continent. That will give us an immediate 0.6% GDP boost. When a country is growing at 1.5% to 2%, an extra 0.6% represents a material improvement in its growth rate. We will not just get that £12 billion as a one-off in the first year; we will get it in every successive year, because we will have that money available to spend.

I campaigned in the previous election for the Brexit vote to be properly implemented, and my constituents gave me a majority knowing that that was my view. I also campaigned on the ticket of prosperity not austerity. I do want more money spent on the schools and hospitals in Wokingham and the local area. I am very pleased with our latest settlement, because health staff need more money. I am also very pleased that the weighting of the percentage increases is much more generous to those on low pay, because in my area it is extremely difficult getting by on those low pay rates. We need to recruit and retain more and to give more people in those jobs the hope that they can go on to better paid jobs with good career progression.

I want more money spent, but I do not want it spent irresponsibly. I am offering the Government the biggest spending cut that they will ever make, which is the £12 billion a year that we do not need to keep on sending to Brussels. In the spirit of the Brexit vote, I say bring our money back, take control of it and spend it on our priorities.

Before the referendum, I took the precaution of setting out a draft Budget that I would like the Government to adopt. I explained that I was very unlikely to be the Chancellor of the Exchequer and that people could not

[John Redwood]

take my draft as a promise; it was a set of ideas on how that money could be spent. I suggested, mainly, more spending on areas such as health and social care and education, and also on tax reductions—getting rid of our damaging VAT rates on green products, on feminine hygiene products and on domestic heating fuel, which hit those on the lowest pay most heavily. Those are things that we cannot do for ourselves all the time that we are in the European Union.

Alison Thewliss: The Government's failure to negotiate a zero-rate tampon tax does not give us great hope for any further negotiations with the EU.

John Redwood: I think that the hon. Lady will agree that this is one area where even she must see that getting out of the EU is a big positive, because she and I will be able to unite on something for once, and shove the abolition of this much-hated tax through the House. Is it not a disgrace that the world's fifth largest economy and an important country cannot even control its own taxes? Over all those years in the EU, we were assured by Governments of all persuasions that tax was a red line and that the House of Commons would always be able to decide what the tax rates would be and what was going to have to be taxed. That simply will not be true until we leave the EU.

That is the first bonus. The Brexit dividend is to take control of our money and to spend it on our priorities. It will have a double advantage: not only will it give a boost to growth the first time we do it, but it will cut our balance of payments deficit. I am more worried about our balance of payments deficit than our state deficit, because the Government have done a great job in getting the state deficit down to perfectly reasonable levels, whereas the balance of payments deficit needs working on. The simplest way of cutting it is to stop sending money to the EU, because that is like a load of imports.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I wish to ask a serious question. The right hon. Gentleman is very well remunerated for his views on finance and is very much sought after for advice in the City. He will know that, if we were to lose just 10% of, say, the financial services sector in the UK, as a result of market access ending through Brexit, that would constitute a loss of £8 billion to £9 billion in taxation to this country. Is he genuinely not worried at all that we need to retain some elements in our economic relationship with the European Union as part of those Brexit talks?

John Redwood: I am an optimist. We will have a perfectly good economic relationship even if we do not get a comprehensive formal deal of the kind that I know those on the Front Bench would really like to secure. The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. Well, let me give him the evidence. When I studied this subject before the referendum—I always like to ensure that I give good advice, so I try to find out what I am talking about and have some facts—I looked at the economic performance of the United Kingdom during the early 1970s, when we first entered the European Economic Community, and took great interest in the economic growth rate around 1992 when the single market was completed, which people say is so crucial to our growth rate. From that, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we

cannot see any positive kick up in the graph of UK growth either when we first joined the EEC or when the single market was completed in the early 1990s. Indeed, the growth rate fell off on both occasions. I do not blame the EU for all of that, but it shows that there was no great benefit.

If there was no benefit going into the thing, why should there be something negative when we come out? It is not asymmetric. There will not be a hit. I promise him that when we look back on it all in five years' time, he will not be able to see that—certainly on world growth graphs and, I suspect, on UK economic graphs—when we left the EU. It will not be a big economic event. It is a massively important political event, but it will not be a significant economic event, because joining it was not. Indeed, even worse, in the immediate aftermath of both joining the EEC and of completing the single market, there were very big recessions where our growth rate took a very big hit. I do not blame the EEC for the first one—that was more to do with international banking and the oil crisis—but I entirely blame the EU for the second one, because it was the European exchange rate mechanism that ripped the heart out of our companies and our economy and led to a boom and bust that was almost as big as Labour's at the end of the last decade. That was why we did so badly.

Let me now go into a little more detail on some of the crucial sectors that have been badly damaged by our membership of the EEC, and then the EU and single market. We can do rather better in those areas once we are out of the legal entanglements.

Let us start with the most obvious and topical one this week—the fishing industry. When we first went into the EEC, we had a flourishing fishing industry, with a large number of trawlers and successful fishing ports in Scotland, England and Wales, and a net surplus of fish. We were an exporter of fish because we had access to one of the richest fishing grounds in the world in our own territorial waters and beyond. The common fisheries policy destroyed much of that. Many of our boats were lost, and much of our fishing capacity was lost. We are now a heavy net importer of fish, as a result of being part of the common fisheries policy. Our fishing grounds have been greatly damaged, because too many industrial trawlers have been allowed in from outside to do damage to the seabed and to the shoals of fish that we once had. The quota system has not really worked because of the discard policy.

It would be easy to design a UK fishing policy through which we would have both more fish to eat and we would take fewer fish out of the sea. We would do that by not having the discards. It would also be easy to design a policy in which the fish was landed in the UK, so that there would be more economic benefit for us in processing and selling it on, and in which we would have much more capacity in the English and the Scottish fleets so that we could capture more of the added value. I look forward to the Secretary of State publishing a detailed strategy and offering us draft legislation, and I look forward to the Scottish National party supporting that legislation, because it must know how important the recovery of our fishing industry is.

Peter Dowd: I know that Mrs Thatcher was a great heroine of the right hon. Gentleman. She said:

“Just think for a moment what a prospect that is. A single market without barriers—visible or invisible—giving you direct

and unhindered access to the purchasing power of over 300 million of the world's wealthiest and most prosperous people."

It is now 500 million. Was she wrong at the time?

John Redwood: Mrs Thatcher was not always right. As her chief policy adviser, I gave her extremely good advice on the single market, which she did not actually accept. She took most of my advice on a lot of things, but I told her not to give the veto away—it was not worth it, because we needed to keep control of our own law making. However, the Foreign Office was more persuasive than I was, and that was where things started to go wrong. We were tricked into accepting what she hoped—and what a lot of British people thought—was just going to be a free market where there were fewer barriers for trade.

What actually happened was that we were entrapped in a massive legislative programme, which meant that more and more controls—often of an anti-business nature—were imposed, even when the UK did not want them and even when we had voted against them, when we were in the minority. That is why many British people fell out of love with the Common Market that they thought they had voted for in the early 1970s; they thought that it would just be about more jobs and more trade, but discovered that it was about the EU taking control. I am afraid that, on that occasion, Margaret Thatcher was less than perfect. She did not choose the right advice to follow. If she had vetoed the loss of the veto, the hon. Gentleman might have had his way and we would still be in the European Union with a rather different relationship from the one that we were forced into taking.

I turn now to the energy industry. Under European rules we were trapped in a common European energy policy, which meant that we went from being entirely self-sufficient in energy to being quite heavy importers. There is a wish to make us more and more dependent on imported electricity and gas through interconnectors with the continent, meaning that we have less security of supply and are more dependent on the good will of many people on the continent—ultimately, on Russian good will, because of the importance of Russian gas to the energy supply on the continent. Fortunately, the situation has not gone damagingly too far, and we can rescue it when we come out of the European Union. Our gas supplies can be much more dependent on Norway and Qatar, which are not members of the European Union. That is a useful precaution because we can trust those suppliers and the supply will not be subject to the same common problem that might arise in the European system.

We need to be careful about the framework of regulation. I am all in favour of cleaner air and looking after the environment, but the rapid and premature closure of coal power stations before we have good, reliable alternatives puts us in a bit more jeopardy. We have already experienced cold days, when there is big industrial demand but very little wind; it is extremely difficult to balance the system and keep up the full amount of power that people want. We may have to go on to industrial rationing in some cases. If we follow European policy and shut all the coal stations without having proper, reliable alternatives in place, running a good industrial strategy will be that much more difficult.

What would I put at the top of my list for a good industrial strategy? My No. 1 need would be a plentiful and cheap supply of energy. Having had jobs that involved

running factories and dealing with transformation materials that have a high energy content, I know the importance of reliability and relatively low price for running certain kinds of process industry. The United States are now reindustrialising because they will have access to a lot more cheap feedstock and fuel as a result of their drive to have much more domestic energy, at a time when we have been going in the other direction by becoming more reliant on other systems that are not reliable and on imports. We are now finding that we are becoming short, and our power—certainly at peak demand—can be extremely expensive unless people have a long-term contract that properly protects them.

I urge Ministers to use the opportunity to rethink our energy strategy, and to put it at the top of the list for the industrial strategy they tell us they want, because it is the No. 1 requirement for a strong industry across the piece. The other day I was talking to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton), who reminded me just how important cheap and readily available gas is to the Potteries. We want those industries to grow and flourish—I used to be involved in them a bit—and there is huge scope for that, but it will require a sensible, UK-based energy policy.

I turn next to the vehicle industry, which I think will be just fine. It has been built, with a lot of foreign investment and local talent, into a very fine industry. But we need to remember its exact shape. The UK has the capacity to make about 1.7 million cars per annum, but it has the capacity to build 2.7 million engines. Last year 1 million of those engines were diesel. Successive Governments have done a good job of persuading large motor and engine manufacturers to come to or expand in the UK. We now have a centre of excellence in diesel engine technology, and engine production generally, for passenger cars and light vans. We should be rightly proud of that, but it is important that the Government understand this achievement and do not do things that inadvertently damage it.

Car sales continued to rise very nicely after the Brexit vote. We experienced a very strong market and there was a good trend of car sales in the UK for the first nine months after the Brexit vote, as was happening before. But in spring last year there was a sharp reduction, which has continued. Why has this happened? Well, it is nothing to do with Brexit. It is to do with policy decisions taken in the United Kingdom. Three things happened at the same time.

First, it was decided that too many car loans were being advanced, so there was a restriction on car loan credit. I think we worry too much about that. There is security: people who get car loans usually have reasonable jobs and incomes. I am pleased to say that we are not looking at a set of job losses any time soon, so I cannot really see the big problem. Secondly, there was the imposition of much higher vehicle excise duty, particularly on higher-value cars, which are particularly profitable and successful to make.

Thirdly, of course, there were the general arguments that diesel is no longer acceptable. Diesel technology in this country, and through European regulation, has reached much higher standards of cleanliness and control of exhaust. As far as we know, all these engines are more than meeting the legal requirements, because we all want cleaner air. But if the idea gets abroad that all these standards are actually going to be tightened very quickly,

[John Redwood]

or that it is going to become unacceptable to run a diesel engine, it puts people off buying. There has therefore been a big collapse in support for diesel engines and cars, which explains the pattern in that market. I hope that the Government will look at a sensible compromise. Yes, we want clean air, but we also need to say and do supportive things for what is now a very important industry in our country.

There is huge scope for farming. The Secretary of State has made a start with his White Paper, but it still of a fairly high level of generality. I look forward to more detail soon. The motif of the policy must be that we can and should grow more for ourselves. In the early days after we joined the European Community, we were about 95% self-sufficient in temperate food, which is the kind of food that we can produce; we are now under 70% self-sufficient. We import a lot of food from the Netherlands and Denmark—countries with similar climates to our own—and quite a lot from Spain, which produces some things that we cannot grow for ourselves, although we could buy cheaper alternatives from South Africa or Israel if we were allowed to do so. We need to look at all that and do a better deal for the lower-income countries that can sell us food that we cannot grow for ourselves without the same kind of tariff barriers. We also need to do a lot more work on how we can grow more of our own food.

Alison Thewliss: The right hon. Gentleman's point on growing our own food falls if we do not have the people here to pick that food. It will be rotting in the fields, as is already starting to happen, because EU workers who have come over to do this job are leaving, and our own workers do not want to do it.

John Redwood: There is still quite a large number of net inward migrants to this country. I look forward to higher wages and more automation. All these problems are perfectly soluble. There are now some good automatic systems for picking produce, if people do not want to do those jobs. I hope that there will be more productive ways of employing people so that they can be paid more—for instance, if they work smarter and have more technology to support them. That would be good for the employee and for the farming business. Some of this is about scale and some is about investment.

I hope that we develop a farming policy that still provides public money to support farms sensibly, but that will be more geared to the production and successful sale of food, particularly domestically. We want fewer food miles on the clock and rather more local produce. I hope that the policy will allow and encourage more agricultural businesses in the United Kingdom to add value to the product coming from the field, shed or farm, because that is an important part of developing a prosperous and more successful economy.

The UK has enormous scope in sectors such as the media because we have the huge advantage of the English language. We largely share that advantage with the United States of America, which is also very good at media and internet-related businesses. I look forward to the tech revolution being an important part of our better-paid jobs and in the increase in jobs in the future. Once we are out of the EU, we will also be able to choose our own tax and regulatory regimes. I trust that we will choose a best-in-class, world-leading regime for

both tax and regulation. Although I understand some of the irritations that the EU and others have with existing large technology companies, it is important that we also understand how phenomenally popular their services are, how hugely important they are as wealth generators, the choice they offer customers and the new jobs that they will create. We therefore need a tax and regulatory regime that is fair and is not part of a trade war between the EU and the United States of America, which seems to be developing at the moment in an unfortunate way.

Infrastructure is very important. One thing that perhaps unites the House is that we would all like more investment in infrastructure, although we then have disagreements about pace, style, and ways of financing it. There is huge scope for more infrastructure in this country. If we wish to take advantage of our greater freedoms and the kinds of business developments I have been sketching in different sectors, we will certainly need a lot more capacity in road and rail. Rail capacity can be increased more cheaply and more rapidly if we go over to digital controls. One of the features of our railway system is that we run very few trains an hour on any given piece of track. With better controls, we could increase the number of trains we ran on existing track—a quicker and cheaper solution than having to build lots of new tracks.

We are going to need improved road transport. Internet styles of purchasing require road capacity for all the van deliveries that will be made when people have bought on the web. Road capacity is also needed for those who still like going to a traditional shop and expect to find somewhere to park when they do so. Only the shopping centres that have really good access and really good parking are likely to flourish in today's world, because people naturally want convenience. I trust that the Government will find sufficient public capital support for these necessary programmes, but will also be imaginative in finding new ways of harnessing private finance where that is appropriate, as it clearly is in areas like energy and communications where there are defined revenue flows that should be financeable through the private sector.

The aim of Brexit is to cheer the country up, to get wages up, and to get jobs up. So far it is all going reasonably well. There are more jobs after the Brexit vote, despite the false forecasts. Pay is going up a bit. We would like more improvement in real pay, and it is good to see some moves being made in the public sector. The big Brexit bonuses we want comprise spending our own money and knowing when, how much, and what we are going to get for it; having a fishing policy that makes sense both for British fishermen and for British fish; having a better agricultural policy that means we can grow more of our own food; and having an energy and industrial policy that supports more investment and more growth.

Peter Dowd: The right hon. Gentleman is an advocate of a united kingdom, especially as we are coming out of Europe, but there is the vexed question of Northern Ireland. How does he see that fitting in with his vision for the future? It is very important for Northern Ireland, as part of our UK economy, to understand where he is coming from on this matter.

John Redwood: I trust that Northern Ireland, as part of the United Kingdom, will benefit from the economic policies I have been describing. It is the settled wish of a

majority in Northern Ireland that they stay part of the United Kingdom, and they are very welcome. If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the alleged difficulties regarding the border, I simply do not think that that is a serious, real problem. It is obviously a political problem because the EU wishes to make it so, but the EU needs to understand that this border is already a complex one. When goods are being moved either way between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, there is a currency change to be effected, and there are different incidences in excise rates, VAT, income tax and corporation tax levels on each side of the border. Yet we do not have a man or a woman at the border stopping every truck and working out the sums on what has to be done on the excise tax or the currency, because that would be ridiculous. If we end up with World Trade Organisation-based trading so that there do have to be tariffs at the border, it is no more difficult to calculate the tariff electronically and charge it away from the border than it is to charge the excise and the VAT at the moment. We know how to do it; it is not that complicated: we live in the electronic age. I can see that Labour Members want to live in the pre-computer world and do not think that we can send data electronically, but I assure them that it is a magical development.

Jonathan Reynolds: The slogan of the leave campaign was “Take back control”. What does that mean if it does not mean taking back control of one’s borders? There are movements of people that need to be considered. There is still the common travel area between this country and the Republic of Ireland. One cannot simply introduce borders and then tell the British public that those borders will not be physical, or even exist, because there will somehow be a digital solution. It is not practical to say that those borders are going to be put in place and then they will not exist.

John Redwood: The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that all parties have always agreed that we keep the common travel area with the Republic of Ireland. That has always been a given. It was not dependent on the EU in the first place, and everybody wants to keep it.

Let us deal with the question of our UK external border, wherever it may be, and the issue of migration. Yes, the British people voted to have more controls over the number of people who come to work and settle here. The Prime Minister has promised on several occasions that she will get the net migration total down to tens of thousands from the quarter of a million-plus we have been experiencing each year, and I wish her every success with that. We do not need new hard border checks because, as I understand the way that thinking is going in the Government—the way I encourage it to go—we just want to control two things. We want to control the right to work through a work permit system and we wish to control the entitlement to benefit by making sure that people are properly qualified for it. That does not require big controls at the border. Anybody is welcome to come as a tourist, to come and spend their own money, and to come and invest. That is not what we are trying to stop. We can control the things we wish to control through a work permit system and through a benefit system.

Peter Dowd: I am listening carefully to the right hon. Gentleman, if only out of a sense of morbid curiosity, with regard to how he is going to explain practically the

situation in Northern Ireland. We have heard a lot of abstract ideas; we need practical solutions. It is incumbent on him to give us a serious, practical way forward in relation to that problem, which is very serious, notwithstanding what he says.

John Redwood: I do not agree. It is already a complex border. There are already anti-smuggling arrangements. There are already methods that satisfy those on both sides of the border as regards the possible passage of criminals and so forth. All those things will stay in place. They are not made that much more complicated by our leaving the EU. The Republic of Ireland is not part of Schengen; it does not have those special arrangements that the rest of the EU has, so this is making a mountain out of a molehill. Indeed, I do not think it is even a molehill. I just do not understand why serious people can think that it is a serious issue. I understand why political people want it to be an issue—because they want to extract a price from the United Kingdom, as if we had not already offered enough in the interests of friendly relations, in due course, with the European Union. I assure Labour Front Benchers, who are meant to be pro-Brexit and have a lot of pro-Brexit voters, that I cannot see any extra complication that cannot be solved by a bit of electronics and the development of what we already have, because it is already quite a complex border.

There are huge opportunities. If we take advantage of these freedoms, we can boost our growth rate. I have shown how we can do that in a few individual sectors. I have shown overall how we will do it by spending our own money, and explained how we have a huge opportunity to rein in some of the excessive imports we are taking in at the moment by replacing them with home production. We can do many good trade deals around the world to extend and improve our trade with the rest of the world, which is already good, growing and flourishing despite tariffs and WTO terms: we know how they work and they work just fine. I just say this to the Government: let us get on with it; let us not make any more concessions; and let us make sure that if we do end up with a deal, it is a deal worth having.

1.58 pm

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this general debate on the economy. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) said that this should be about prosperity, not austerity, but it is increasingly clear that we need to listen to our councils when they advise us that their struggle is real. The Minister referred to Eeyore. I have heard that a number of times from Conservative Members and I consider it quite apt, because I believe that Eeyore means “eight years of rogue equality” with regard to economic policy. We cannot keep on cutting funding and expecting people, especially councils, to do more with less. Councils are dealing with an unprecedented surge in demand, with a 140% increase in child protection inquiries in the past 10 years. Even the Local Government Association has raised concerns that there is still no clarity about how local government will be funded after the four-year funding deal runs out in March 2020.

The Government urgently need to get a grip of the crisis facing children’s social services as the £2 billion funding gap that those services face by 2020 threatens to put more children at risk. The number of children

[Fiona Onasanya]

taken into care is at its highest since 1985, yet according to the National Children's Bureau, more than one in three councillors nationally warn that cuts have left them with insufficient resources to support those children.

Between 2010 and 2020, Peterborough City Council, which covers my constituency, will have had its direct funding cut by 78.7%. How is my authority expected to meet the rising demands of adult social care and children's services with such devastating funding cuts? Austerity has not tackled the deficit; rather, it has passed it on to public services.

In March 2018, the National Audit Office reported that many local authorities rely on using their savings to fund local services and increasingly find themselves in an unsustainable financial position. In my constituency, there has been a real-terms cut of 10.6% in adult social care, which is almost double the national average, and the Government committed no further funding for social care in the Budget. The money offered to councils in the local government finance settlement is nowhere near enough to calm this crisis. Those services are overstretched, and the recent trends in funding are unsustainable and unacceptable.

For far too long, Peterborough's needs have been attended to on the cheap. As a consequence—cuts have consequences—cracks are beginning to appear in our services. The needs of my constituency have not been properly or adequately addressed, and the current settlement is blatantly below par.

I believe in helping others and I am seeking to do so in my constituency, as is my council. However, it is finding it increasingly difficult to do so because of the budgetary cuts. It is therefore no surprise that Peterborough is ranked 46th on Shelter's list relating to people who are in temporary accommodation or sleeping rough.

Support and praise must be given to the Light Project and its work on the Peterborough winter night shelter. It is actively looking into daytime provision for homeless people, as well as mentoring and befriending them, in order to aid my city and step in to fill a void to which austerity has contributed.

I conclude with the words of a volunteer who helps to serve the homeless of my constituency:

“Homelessness and loneliness go often hand in hand

You walk on past,

don't see me here, a living breathing man

I smile at you the best I can, shivering in the cold

You turn your head and pass on by,

how can you be so bold?

Before you knew it I was here,

I used to be like you

And now I sit here all alone,

with nothing much to do

Just one crisis from the street, I wonder if you care

Open your eyes up to the truth,

it's happening everywhere.”

2.4 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya), and I do so with good heart, because although Tendring District Council has experienced year-on-year

revenue support grant reductions, we are flourishing and have not cut one frontline service. That can be done; we are a lean, mean administration machine.

Unlike the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd), I recognise that it is springtime and our economy has gone beyond green shoots. The financial sap is positively rising: unemployment is at a near record low; the deficit is down; and there is more investment in our vital public services, including £4.2 billion for our NHS. That means that the “Agenda for Change” staff in England are to receive a pay rise of at least 6.5% over the next three years. As the Secretary of State for Health tweeted yesterday:

“Rarely has a pay rise been more deserved.”

I thoroughly agree.

I was delighted to hear in the spring statement that there may be capacity for further increases in public spending and investment in the years ahead. Of course, that would be done while continuing to drive value for money to ensure that not a single penny of precious taxpayers' money is wasted. It is therefore good news that the most recent forecasts of the Office for Budget Responsibility suggest that economic improvements will be maintained. It is also clear to me that the economy is already beating the forecasts and correcting the naysayers, and I have no doubt that it will continue to grow, create jobs and beat those expectations after we leave the European Union. This is a time to celebrate those improvements, not talk them down, which can only do damage to our prospects.

I was also pleased to hear the OBR's projections that following Brexit our payments to the EU will be £4.9 billion lower in 2025 than they are today. Consequently, I maintain that there will be opportunities to spend in both the short and the medium term, which brings me neatly on to the question of where that money should be spent.

I believe that some of the money should certainly be spent on business and infrastructure. In a previous life, when I was Tendring's cabinet member for regeneration and inward investment, I saw at first hand how support for businesses and infrastructure can pay tremendous dividends for economic growth. At the core of all that is the need not just to make cash available, but to make sure that it is spent in a timely and appropriate manner, and used to build infrastructure for future growth. It is a question of *i* before *e*—infrastructure before expansion.

In my previous role, I made grants of up to £150,000 available to businesses in Tendring so that they could grow, flourish and create new jobs in manufacturing, engineering, energy, low-carbon, maritime, and research and development activities. That cash came from the Tendring District Council small and medium-sized enterprise growth fund, which I introduced. We could move quickly and effectively, and therefore grow a great reputation as a business-friendly council. Moreover, being a district that very much marketed itself as open for business meant that we turned heads towards our glorious sunshine coast.

For example, with £16,000 from our growth fund, we managed to attract the Lampshade Company, a bespoke shade manufacturer, to our patch. We also got Ball Launcher with a £70,000 grant. It makes a football launching device to train players—very topical. When it came, it brought jobs with it, and that happened

because Tendring was a council that was out there touting for business. Those are examples of committing cash for infrastructure. Business gets excited and then wants to work with us and to invest—it is a win-win situation.

That is why, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), I regularly use my position in this House—I am sure that many hon. Members have noticed this—to call on Ministers to spend more on roads and rail for Clacton and the east coast to address the fact that it takes far too long to commute from Clacton to the capital. The distance is only 70 miles, but the journey takes nearly one hour and 40 minutes by train. If we cut that journey time to closer to an hour, we would regenerate the east of Essex at a stroke.

It will come as no surprise to hon. Members that I ask the Chancellor to consider diverting some of the Brexit dividend to Clacton's much overlooked infrastructure. Investment should be delivered locally, to unlock the economic potential of communities such as Clacton; regionally, to improve connectivity between our economic hubs, including through the improvements to the A120 that we have long called for; and nationally, to rebalance our economy. Crucially, that investment will not only attract business, but upgrade the UK's infrastructure and underpin the Government's modern industrial strategy, which is good for our economy and our country.

It would be remiss of me if I did not ask, during this period of strong economic development, that the Chancellor listens to the representations of my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary and ensures that our military gets the £2 billion a year it needs to deal with constant and growing threats, and rising equipment costs. I am a member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, and I have worked closely with our military personnel, who do an exceptional job in difficult circumstances. As a result, it has become clear to me that while our forces are, on the whole, superbly equipped, they need serious support to enhance their capability. It is imperative that those hard-working, brave men and women feel valued and supported.

Following our success in removing the cap on the police precept, I have no doubt that the Government fully support our hard-working local police forces, for which I am incredibly grateful. I would, however, now ask that the Government use some of the Brexit dividend to do the same for our valiant and professional armed forces.

Peter Dowd: If I visited Clacton and then decided to go across the water to the continent, would the hon. Gentleman think that my new blue passport should be made in Britain or in France? Will he give me a bit of advice on that?

Giles Watling: I can give the hon. Gentleman some great advice, and one of the first pieces of advice would be that he comes to Clacton. It is one of the most beautiful places in the country. We have 36 miles of unspoilt coastline, some of the greatest beaches and great backwaters. I am very proud of my passport—I have it with me now—and if it is blue, let us make sure that we get the best value for money in the printing of the things.

Peter Dowd: I am absolutely delighted by the hon. Gentleman's invitation to Clacton—I am more than happy for us to compare our diaries—but he really should

answer my question: does he think that my new blue British passport should be made in this country or by the French?

Giles Watling: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that I did answer his question—I said that we have to get the best deal possible. We are still a member of the EU, with its rules and regulations in place, and we have to look for the best possible deal. I would prefer that we made everything in Britain, but we cannot go down that road.

I am certain that the hon. Gentleman will remember that not that long ago—in 2010—the drawer had no money left in it. Well, we are filling it up again, and we must never again leave it in the hands of those who might want to empty it and impoverish our nation, damage our economy and hurt those least able to help themselves. This period of economic growth presents us with funding opportunities, and I hope that the Chancellor will make the best use of those opportunities by investing in our infrastructure, which will attract new business to participate in the Great British economy.

2.12 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Well, how do you follow that, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling), who delivered his speech in his own inimitable style.

I must say that I am a bit disappointed that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) has now left his place; I am sure he is away to have a cup of tea or something like that. He spent a huge amount of time saying how terrible Treasury forecasts were, and the irony of that was not lost on me. I was an activist during the entire Scottish independence referendum campaign, and we were told by the UK Government, Conservative Members and, indeed, Better Together, how terrible the forecasts looked, so it was ironic to listen to him rubbish such forecasts. I will certainly bear that in mind when Scotland gets another independence referendum.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Scottish Government were wrong in their forecasts? They said that £1.8 billion came in from oil revenues in 2015, but that went down to £60 million in 2016. Their White Paper was very much based on such oil revenues coming in, but that would never have been the case.

David Linden: At least the Scottish Government produced a White Paper, which was a heck of a lot more than the UK Government provided in the run-up to the Brexit referendum. Perhaps the fact that there was not enough information was the reason why a number of people in the UK felt they could not make up their mind on the referendum.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham spent a lot of time talking about fishing. One of his great heroines is Margaret Thatcher, but it was of course Margaret Thatcher who said that the Scottish fishing industry was “expendable”, so I will take no lessons from him on fishing.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the economy. My Chief Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), who has just come into the Chamber, tells me that the

[David Linden]

debate can last until 5 pm. I will not speak for the next two hours and 45 minutes, because some members of the Press Gallery would not be happy, but this is a good opportunity for us to focus on the record of a UK Government who are very much asleep at the wheel.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): I am sorry that I was not in the Chamber earlier, but I was watching the debate, and I listened very carefully to what the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) said. As a socialist of the left, I clearly have some differences with him, but he focused on one thing with which I agree—the balance of trade and our enormous net financial contribution to the rest of the EU. That contribution amounts to about £100 billion this year: we are paying 5% net of our total GDP into the EU. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that that is a very valid point?

David Linden: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point, and I am about to come on to Brexit. We know that Brexit is casting a very large shadow over the UK economy, and precious Government spending—up to £3 billion—is being set aside to counter the self-inflicted harm of a hard Brexit. After the Prime Minister took office, she said that she would deliver a red, white and blue Brexit, but I certainly did not expect such a Brexit to mean that passports would be made in France. But by all means—there you go.

One announcement that I do welcome is the Government's decision on NHS staff pay. I welcomed it for the SNP from the Front Bench during yesterday's urgent question. I commend the Government for taking action finally to give England's hard-working NHS staff a pay rise, and I very much hope that the Welsh Labour Government will follow and do likewise.

Of course, in Scotland, the SNP Scottish Government was the first devolved Government in the UK to commit to lifting the public sector pay cap. We have already delivered on our promise on public sector pay, setting a 3% pay increase for those earning up to £36,500, which has the potential to benefit three quarters of Scotland's public sector workforce. It is only fair that I declare an interest at this juncture in that my wife is a primary school teacher employed by Glasgow City Council and will receive that pay rise. Those earning over that threshold of £36,500 but less than £80,000 will receive a pay rise of up to 2%, and those earning over £80,000 will receive a £1,600 uplift. The 3% increase potentially covers 82% of NHS staff in Scotland for the next financial year, 2018-19. The Chancellor's announcement will of course result in Barnett consequentials being allocated to the Scottish Government, and Ministers in Scotland have indicated that they will use this money to support "Agenda for Change" staff in Scotland.

Today's general debate on the economy allows us the opportunity to take stock of the current economic climate, which does not make pleasant reading for Treasury Ministers. The independent Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts economic growth to be lower in each of the next five years than annual growth was in 2017, when it was 1.7%. Indeed, the Institute for Fiscal Studies notes that this puts the UK's growth prospects "among the worst in the G20."

The right hon. Member for Wokingham—I am afraid that he is not in the Chamber—felt that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) painted a somewhat doom-laden picture, but that is just the reality. We can argue about politics, but we cannot argue about the facts. The IFS goes on to warn:

"Dismal productivity growth, dismal earnings growth and dismal economic growth are not just part of the history of the last decade, they appear to be the new normal."

Britain now has the worst wage growth in 210 years, with a hard Brexit threatening to provide further shocks to an already fragile economy.

Treasury Ministers know that Brexit will be an economic disaster, and that is why the Government are setting aside £3 billion in 2018-19 and 2019-20 for expenditure on Brexit preparations. The Scottish Government will receive only 2.5% or £37 million of the funding allocated for 2018-19. I would be keen for the Exchequer Secretary, when he sums up, to explain how that figure was actually arrived at, because I certainly cannot work it out. It is deeply frustrating that the money we are receiving falls significantly short of the full Barnett share of the funding allocated at UK level.

I would be doing a huge disservice to Scotland if I did not take this opportunity to call once again, as many SNP colleagues have done, on Treasury Ministers to return the £175 million in past VAT payments to Scotland in respect of Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. I know that my own area commander would be more than happy to see some of that money coming back, and he could invest it.

Kelvin Hopkins: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the great advantage of being a United Kingdom is that we can redistribute from the wealthiest areas to those in greater need? Sometimes, through the Barnett formula and regional spending, money can be redistributed from places such as the south-east, which is very wealthy, to places that are less wealthy, such as Scotland.

David Linden: Yes, and one of those less wealthy places is my constituency of Glasgow East, but people there do not regularly come to me and say how wonderful the United Kingdom is because it has these lovely nuclear weapons that can defend the foodbank in Parkhead. I welcome the decision to include the police and fire and rescue services in the exemption from UK VAT, but it is only fair that the £175 million is returned to Scotland, so that we can invest.

Kirstene Hair: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Scottish Government were well aware of the implications of a Scotland-wide police force, yet they still forged ahead with it?

David Linden: Indeed, that is correct, and I am sure the hon. Lady will also take the opportunity to place on record the fact that the Scottish Conservative party also went into the election with that as a manifesto commitment. It is not a strong point for the Conservative party.

This Government's stewardship of the economy is based on the choices they make. In one respect, the Chancellor and his Ministers paint themselves as fiscally prudent Steady Eddies who wish to avoid a spending splurge. They will tell the WASPI women that there is no money for transitional arrangements and implement

painful social security cuts for the disabled. They will depress wages for young people who are unfairly excluded from the national living wage. They will tell us that fiscal prudence and sensible spending is the order of the day, but then they will magic up £1 billion pounds for their grubby confidence and supply deal with the DUP. They will magic up £4 billion to tart up this royal palace and all our lovely offices, and £3 billion for Brexit spending. In truth, how we run our economy is about the choices we make, and this Government's choices have failed the basic tests of investing in people and public services and of delivering social justice for the most vulnerable in our communities.

2.21 pm

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): It is now nearly eight years since Labour left this country in the grips of an economic crisis, and it is undeniable that we have come a long way since then. Unemployment is now at lows last seen in the mid-1970s, and not even in the years before the last recession were so few people out of work. Indeed, we used to debate whether such low unemployment rates were even possible in a modern economy and whether “full employment” these days means simply a higher level than it used to be.

Under this Conservative Government, we have proved the doubters wrong. Our economic policies, such as cutting corporation tax from 28% to 19%, have spurred job creation, and our welfare policies—in particular universal credit—have stopped the scandal of people being punished by the benefits system for entering work or increasing their hours.

Employment is not the only area of success. The UK's economic growth continues to outperform expectations, and the £154 billion a year deficit that Labour left us with has now been cut to just £45 billion. Conservative policies have cleared up the mess left behind by Labour and brought prosperity back to Britain. That makes me all the more angry and disappointed that, thanks to SNP misrule, Scotland is not fully sharing in that prosperity. The story of Scotland under the SNP is an outrage in itself, but it is also a cautionary tale about what the SNP would do to Scotland if it achieved its dream of independence and about what a hard-left Labour Government, propped up by Scottish Labour and the SNP, would do to Britain.

Scotland's economic growth has been well below 1% for two years in a row, while the rest of the United Kingdom races ahead. Once population growth is accounted for, Scotland is hardly growing at all. Even more shocking is the fact that the Scottish Fiscal Commission expects that stagnation to continue, until growth finally limps above 1% in 2022. That would mean six consecutive years on the brink of recession—a malaise the likes of which we have not seen in 60 years.

Peter Dowd: We heard the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood)—

David Linden: Where is he?

Peter Dowd: Where is he indeed? We heard the right hon. Gentleman completely distance himself from Mrs Thatcher, which is an achievement in itself. I now give the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) the opportunity to distance herself from Mrs Thatcher's

policies, which saw mines and shipyards closed down and industry completely decimated in Scotland. Will she apologise for that?

Kirstene Hair: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I am most concerned about the Labour leader, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), leading Britain.

The Salmond-Sturgeon era is turning into a dark period in Scotland's history. Let there be no doubt that the blame for Scotland's stagnant economy lies squarely with the SNP, which has made Scotland the most taxed part of the United Kingdom.

David Linden: During my time in Parliament as an MP and before that as a researcher, I heard Conservative Members say often that Scotland has tax powers, so why are they not being used. That is precisely what the Scottish Government have done. It may be that I and the hon. Lady will pay more tax, but that is fair because we earn a pretty good salary. In reality, however, most people in Scotland are paying less tax. Will she acknowledge that?

Kirstene Hair: I campaigned hard about the fact that some people, such as members of the armed forces, cannot choose where they are stationed. They are being stationed in Scotland not through choice but because that is where they are posted, and they are being unfairly taxed. The hon. Gentleman's colleagues in the Scottish Parliament stated in their 2016 manifesto that they would not increase rates of tax, and they have yet again broken a manifesto promise. I find that disrespectful to the people of Scotland.

David Linden: The hon. Lady is being most generous in giving way, as was I. Does she acknowledge that 83% of members of the armed forces in Scotland will now pay the same or less tax than before?

Kirstene Hair: In fact, 70% of members of the armed forces who are stationed in Scotland will be hit by the SNP's income tax hike. That is a fact and that is why I was so delighted that all the campaigning carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) and me since that announcement was made by the Scottish Government in December has enabled the Secretary of State for Defence to review the situation and consider how the UK Government can try to mitigate that tax increase. We need to encourage people into our armed forces, not push them away.

While the UK Government pursue competitive, pro-growth, low-tax policies, the SNP is taking Scotland in the opposite and, in my opinion, wrong direction. The SNP has created a society where everyone who earns more than £26,000 a year—that includes nurses, primary school teachers, and corporals in the Army and Royal Marines—is labelled a “high earner” and forced to pay more tax than their counterparts in Wales, England and Northern Ireland. Taxpayers in the rest of the United Kingdom should be warned that that is the reality of asking “high earners” to pay more. Despite all that tax, Scottish schools and NHS Scotland services are still chronically underperforming and disgracefully understaffed. That is the picture I see in my constituency in Angus.

David Linden: I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way again. She talks about the NHS and schools being underfunded. How on earth does she expect to fund them by cutting taxes?

Kirstene Hair: I strongly believe that we should allow working people to keep more money in their pockets. The Conservative party has always been the party of low tax, and the contributions from Conservative Members today have shown how that is in the best interests of growing our economy.

The Scottish Government have made an immense mess of business rates, with Scottish businesses having to pay £14 million more in tax than they would if they were based in England. Small wonder that Scotland now has the lowest rate of business growth in the United Kingdom. Of course, it is again the nationalists who are holding Scotland back with their constant threats of putting us through a second independence referendum, which the people of Scotland do not want.

The SNP's goal of independence inside the EU single market would destroy the internal market of the UK, which accounts for 61% of Scotland's exports, yet the SNP turns a blind eye to that. Is it any surprise that businesses and investors are deterred by the SNP holding the threat of a second independence referendum over their heads? The Scottish Government want to sacrifice the UK internal market on the altar of the EU single market, which is almost four times less important to Scotland's economy. They want to take Scotland back into the EU and—invariably—subject Scottish fishing communities to the unjust common fisheries policy in perpetuity. For coastal communities in Angus and across Scotland, getting out of the CFP is the first, necessary step towards reviving our fisheries and wider coastal economy. Fishing already contributes greatly to the Scottish economy, and once out of the CFP, it will have even more to offer. I have said openly that this week's transition deal was disappointing, and the UK Government will have to be extremely vigilant to ensure that the interests of our fishing industry are defended until the end of 2020.

Kelvin Hopkins: I apologise for intruding on private Scottish grief. Does the hon. Lady not accept that the real reason we have sluggish growth in the United Kingdom as a whole is because of Tory austerity, cuts in public spending and low wage growth?

Kirstene Hair: The contributions from my hon. Friends, which I do not need to reiterate, showed the very positive steps the United Kingdom as a whole has taken. Scotland, however, has done less than half of that, which is why it is incredibly important to highlight.

Moreover, the UK Government must deliver full control of our waters, with no compromise on any final Brexit deal that sells out our fishermen in exchange for something else. But the facts remain the same: the Conservative UK Government want us out of the EU and out of the CFP so that our fishing industry can flourish again. The SNP Scottish Government want to fail coastal Scotland again by taking us back into the EU and back into the CFP.

The truth is clear. While the rest of the United Kingdom shares the fruits of successful Conservative policies, Scotland stagnates under the SNP. If anyone wants to

know about the SNP's attitude to economic growth, know simply that in 18 months it still has not spent a penny of its own £500 million growth scheme. I very much welcome the UK Government's investment in the Tay cities deal. This will be a welcome boost to my local economy in Angus and I am working incredibly hard to ensure that rural areas receive their fair share.

I am counting down the days, as are many others, until 6 May 2021, when Scottish voters will give their verdict on the SNP's era of stagnation and bring it to a close. In the meantime, we can only point out what must be done if Scotland is to return to prosperity: an end to the menacing speculation about indyref 2; a clear commitment to preserving the UK internal market through Brexit and beyond; the abolition of the "Nat tax" to ensure that Scotland is no longer the most taxed part of the Union, either for individuals or businesses; and the cutting out of waste and diverting that money to promote growth and make our public services functional again. I hope that, at some point in the next three years, the Scottish Government will see the light and allow Scotland to fully benefit from the strong UK economy that the Conservatives have built, but it is looking increasingly likely that that task will fall to our next First Minister, Ruth Davidson.

2.32 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to speak in a debate, even if, as often happens, it is at the tail-end. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions so far and for their specific interests in the economy. I would like to bring a Northern Ireland perspective to the debate.

The economy is an issue that affects every village, town and city in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We all read the grim, doomsday predictions about Brexit, yet we are still here and we are still standing. We will still be here and we will still be standing after 31 March 2019. I am a proud Brexiteer. Indeed, I think the Democratic Unionist party invented the word, because we were Brexiteers before the word was ever mentioned. We have always had concerns about Europe. It is good that we will now leave, and the sooner the better.

Like all Members, I am always interested to receive the constituency-tailored claimant counts, which indicate how the labour market is performing in our areas. I thank the economics, policy and statistics section of the Library for its sterling work, which it provides to us on request and as a matter of rote. Northern Ireland unemployment is down by 3,400 and now stands at 29,000. There has been a very focused economic strategy for Northern Ireland, which has worked out extremely well. We stand at 3.4% across the whole of Northern Ireland. Some constituencies are below that figure and some may be above it.

The total number of jobseeker's allowance claimants in my constituency in February 2018 was 1,370, or 3.2% of the economically active population aged 16 to 64—the 207th highest of the 650 UK constituencies—but that is down from 5% when I first came into the House in 2010. The equivalent UK claimant rate was 2.7%. The UK unemployment rate, which includes people not claiming benefits and is estimated from survey data, was 4.3% between November 2017 and January 2018. The number of claimants in Strangford constituency is

115 lower than in February 2017, which perhaps indicates that we are moving in the right direction. There were 290 claimants aged 18 to 24 in February 2018, which is 75 lower than February 2017. That, to me, is an indicator that we are progressing. Indeed, as a party colleague highlighted, the latest labour market statistics show Northern Ireland moving in the right economic direction.

It is important to say that we have not had a working, functioning Northern Ireland Assembly for 14 months. In that time, we have experienced some of the greatest growth in Northern Ireland for employment, job opportunities and the economy as a whole. Those are good things, even though we have not had a Northern Ireland Assembly to drive it. Significant employment opportunities have taken place because of the good work of, and the foundations laid down by, the Northern Ireland Assembly, when it was working, and the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Industry. One of my DUP colleagues, in the *Belfast Telegraph*, said:

“Boosting the economy through private sector growth has been a key DUP priority over the last decade. It is very welcome that private sector jobs are now at their highest level since records began in 1974. We want to see that grow further and significant funding secured through the Confidence and Supply agreement to deliver on key infrastructure projects such as the York Street interchange and the superfast broadband are the foundation of future growth.”

Some Members have referred to the £1.4 billion that the DUP secured with the Conservatives as part of the confidence and supply agreement. We would be happy to assist those who are interested in how to negotiate a good deal.

Kelvin Hopkins: I am pleased that Northern Ireland is doing relatively well, in spite of difficulties. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that a factor in manufacturing doing relatively well in Northern Ireland, and in the rest of the United Kingdom, is the depreciation of the pound following the referendum, and that keeping the pound at a sensible level would be better for Northern Ireland’s future and for the United Kingdom’s future?

Jim Shannon: It would be remiss of me to say other than that the value of the pound has enabled our exports to grow and our manufacturing base to maintain its position. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

The DUP’s confidence and supply agreement with the Conservative party has brought in money for everyone in Northern Ireland, regardless of whether they are Unionist, nationalist or anything else. Everybody gains from that agreement.

The House has seen progress on business rates and the small business rates relief scheme. I am very pleased that the Government have continued to ensure that that happens, because it will definitely bring benefit to all the high streets across the United Kingdom. Rates relief has brought opportunities and retained employment in shops in places in my constituency such as Newtownards, Comber and Ballynahinch. Rates relief ensures that we do not have empty shops. Those involved in the retail business say that we have some of the best shopping opportunities in the whole of Northern Ireland.

We have pursued the issues of air passenger duty and tourism VAT, negotiating and consulting with the Conservatives on how the confidence and supply agreement can benefit us, as well as the whole of the United

Kingdom. There are advantages for others across the United Kingdom in a reduction to air passenger duty and tourism VAT. We need to be on equal terms with the Republic of Ireland to be able to grow our tourism sector. The DUP is continuing to work on issues that affect the local economy in Northern Ireland, as well as the whole of the UK economy. We are pleased to be part of the economic success story we have in the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

As the briefing paper succinctly put it, in terms we can understand, in 2016-17 the Government borrowed £46 billion to make up the difference between their spending and the income raised from taxes and other sources. Since 2009-10, the UK’s borrowing—often referred to as the deficit—has fallen by 70%, which again is good news. Borrowing is now at a similar level to that before the 2007-08 financial crisis, and the OBR forecasts that it will fall each year to just over £1 billion in 2022-23, which is equivalent to around 1% of GDP. If anyone thinks that this is not good news, they need to take another look at what it is saying. In laymen’s terms, we still have a massive debt—there is no doubt about that—but, in fairness to the Conservative party, it is trying hard to reduce the deficit, and if we continue along the lines we are on, it will be to the benefit of everyone in the Chamber and every one of our constituents.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it will be to the benefit not just of this generation but of the next generation, given that we currently spend on debt interest alone a sum greater than the entire NHS wage bill? We have to get that down so that future generations can have the public services they deserve.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is not just for us as MPs and our constituents; it is for our children and our grandchildren. We are building a base here, as we have done in Northern Ireland through the Assembly, for a stronger economy in years to come. It is important that we move towards that.

I agree with the Government’s goal of reducing the deficit yearly, but while we must aim to do this, things arise outside of our control, and we must always be able to access spending power to meet those needs. We seem to be stabilising, and yet I am aware of the adverse effect of the roll-out of universal credit. I must put on the record my concern about its effect on the disabled and vulnerable. Opposition Members who have sat with me through many debates will understand my concern.

I am also very aware of the needs of the NHS, which the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) referred to in his intervention, and the importance of providing advantages and opportunities to the NHS when it comes to funding. In the words of an elderly constituent of mine, the NHS “needs to be rubbed out and drawn again, as our highly trained NHS staff are at the end of themselves and living on their nerves with no breaks and crisis management from one hour to the next”. That is why I welcome the Government’s commitment to a 6.5% wage increase for NHS staff over three years. That is good news, and we should all welcome it, because it is a step in the right direction. The DUP asked for that in our negotiations and discussions with the Conservative party, and the Conservative party has accepted it.

[Jim Shannon]

Fishing, which has come up on both sides of the House, is hugely important to me and my constituency, particularly in the village of Portavogie. Since we have an absentee MP for South Down, I should add that it is also important to those from Ardglass and Kilkeel. It is very important that we have a good fishing industry and sector. We are sick and tired of EU bureaucracy and red tape, of quota restrictions and days-at-sea restrictions, of boat numbers reducing in my village of Portavogie from 120 to about 75—the reductions are similar in Kilkeel and Ardglass.

The fishing sector is under pressure, but with Brexit we will have what the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) said: a stronger fishing sector and industry, more employment, more opportunities and more jobs. I, like others, would like to see landings landing on UK soil. That is important. The voisinage agreement is a legal agreement under which we will take back some of the waters that are ours but which under another legal agreement the Republic of Ireland looks after. That will happen, and we will have more control over our own waters. So Brexit brings good news for the fishing sector.

I say the same thing to the Minister today that I said to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs the other day. I want us to make sure that in 2020 we are out. It is the responsibility of Ministers to make sure that happens. The Secretary of State gave me that commitment, and other commitments have been given as well. Those who represent fishing villages understand our concern and angst.

My constituency has seen enormous growth in the agri-foods sector. I think of businesses such as Willowbrook Foods, Mash Direct and Pritchitts—also known as Lakeland Dairies. The latter has three factories, two in the Republic and one in Northern Ireland, and if ever we needed an example of why we need to transition to a soft border, that company is it. Its process involves milk crossing the border three times: first, it comes across in fluid form; then it goes back in powder form; and then it comes back again to Newtownards, where it is packaged and processed, and sold across the world. Rich Sauces is another agri-food business in my constituency that is doing extremely well, and we must remember that this is about not just the guys in the factories doing the production and manufacturing, but the farmers supplying the milk, and those providing arable goods for vegetable firms. Those are the success stories, and we need to reach a satisfactory arrangement for them.

We have also seen new markets created. Lakeland Dairies, for example, is marketing a new milk powder in China. The Minister has been involved with that. He has been helping us to get through the red tape we sometimes have so that we can secure that opportunity. Pharmaceuticals, insurance and light engineering are other growth industries in my constituency, like others. We have many small companies that started off with perhaps half a dozen employees and then grew. Patton's is one that comes to mind right away. It started off with a van and three people; it now has a dozen vans and a workforce of 65.

Good things are happening, so let us talk about them. I do not mean to be disrespectful to anyone—that is not my nature—but if people talk things down enough, they will be down. We must talk them up. Let us talk up

the good things—we should not ignore the negatives—and be positive. Positivity is what we want—it is certainly what I want.

I am aware that even small tax rises—for example, the 4.5% rise in rates for Northern Ireland, coupled with the almost 3% local rise in my constituency, results in a 7.5% rate increase for families slightly above the threshold for help through tax credits—can have an impact on people's quality of life. We tell parents not to feed their children crisps as a lunchtime snack. Crisps cost 10p, but we tell them to give the children an orange, which costs 20p, so that is financially illogical. We tell parents to take their children to after-school clubs to help their social development, but they have to fund that themselves, because cuts have stopped Sure Start and other places from funding classes for children.

Members have referred to food banks. People are always being negative about food banks, but we should be positive. The Trussell Trust food bank in Newtownards in my constituency—we were the first to have one in Northern Ireland—has brought the churches and many individuals together. Every one of them is concerned for those who have nothing. Is it not a good thing when people come together to do something really good, substantial and positive to bring about change?

David Linden: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have huge respect for him and count him as an hon. Friend, but the reality is that the top three reasons why people go to food banks are changes to benefits, low incomes, and insecure employment. I am sure he will put that on record. We do not seek to use this as a political football, but the statistics back up my point.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman beat me to it—I was going to come to that point. Why do people go to food banks? I sign their chits every week, so I know why: because of benefits and delays in receiving them. We have to sharpen our system up. When people are living under a far lower threshold than anyone in this House and many people outside it, we recognise that there are problems. Food banks have brought people together with the right motivation, but they are here for a reason. The hon. Gentleman is right about why that is: because of benefit changes, benefit delays, and marital and relationship break-ups; and because people have lost their jobs. It is good to have the food banks, but they are there for a purpose. I am very pleased to commend the Trussell Trust and the food bank that works through the Thriving Life church in Newtownards in my constituency on what they do. Their volunteers do marvellous work. They are people with passion, belief and concern, as we all have in this House and hopefully outside it as well.

We ask women to get into work, but not enough funded pre-nursery places are available to help them with childcare. We tell parents that they do not get pre-nursery places because they do not meet the benefits threshold. We tell them that they must spend time reading with their children and doing imaginative play after they have had to work all day, although they pay out most of their money on getting an acceptable level of childcare. We say that they should ensure that they take time off for their own mental health.

The Government have tried to address the issue of childcare, and we tried to do so in the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, there is still some way to go on

providing childcare, and I say that respectfully. The Minister might want to come back on that. Other Members feel similarly to me and know where the voids are. For some reason, there is certainly a void in childcare. If we want a woman to work, we have to make sure that she has somewhere to take her children that does not cost her the earth. There is no sense in people working if every pound they get goes on paying for childcare. People want to work to keep them sane, but they also want to be financially better off. I make those points with respect to the Minister.

We encourage family units to provide childcare while, at the same, putting the retirement age up by six years. Again, I feel greatly aggrieved that women have to work beyond their time. Many of us in this House and my party have had discussions with the Government about the WASPI women. We all know what the issues are—those are very clear—and what has happened niggles me and my constituents. Those people have to continue to work, and their children must pay someone to mind their children. It is an advantage when someone has parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles who can do the childcare for them. However, if those family members have to work for another six years, that opportunity is never there.

Alison Thewliss: Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that often these women worked while their children were small and looked forward to the treat of spending quality time with their grandchildren?

Jim Shannon: I absolutely agree. The hon. Lady and I have discussed these things on many occasions. We have a very similar opinion.

I feel that the failure is one that society and perhaps the Government need to address. It has accumulated over a number of years. The economy is essential, as is reducing the deficit, and I support sustainable borrowing, but it is also essential that we provide the support and level of care to make life bearable for our constituents.

Interest rates were referred to earlier. It is absolutely critical that they do not increase so that we keep the economy stabilised, provide opportunities and make sure that we put money in the pockets of our constituents. That will also keep the economy going in the direction that we want so that we make sure that we create more jobs and employment.

I am aware that we bit off too much before the financial crisis, but we cannot compound the problem by putting constituents in debt, or close to debt, as they pay the continual minimal rises that we place on their shoulders. We must do as much as we can to economise while not asking too much from people who are squeezed to the limit. We are moving forward and reducing our nation's debt, but that must not be at the expense of our constituents. I feel that we face that danger at present, and I ask the Minister to take that into account in his response.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have listened to representations following my business statement. For the benefit of the House, I can say that Monday's general debate will now be on national security and Russia.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Leader of the House for her courtesy in letting us know as quickly as possible that the debate has changed.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I draw attention to the statutory instrument that I mentioned this morning at business questions in relation to nursing bursaries that are changed into loans for postgraduate students. Have you heard whether a debate will be scheduled before 28 March, which is the last day for praying against the statutory instrument? If a debate is scheduled after the recess—from 16 April—I ask your advice on whether I could seek an undertaking that if the House agrees to vote against that statutory instrument, it will be revoked.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. I have not received any information from the Government on the matter she raises, but the Leader of the House is here, and I suggest that the hon. Lady discusses the specific point she raises through the usual channels.

2.54 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): It is a great honour to follow the hon. Member for Shannon, which is a beautiful part of our United Kingdom, and it is great to hear so much positive news. [HON. MEMBERS: "Strangford!"] I mean the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I know the area well.

I have frequently said that the economy must come first, because only with a strong economy can we maintain our public purse and fund our other ambitions for healthcare, welfare, education and security. That is why it is such excellent news that the deficit is under control, the debt is falling, employment is at record highs, unemployment is at record lows, inflation is coming back down, real wages are set to rise, and our economic performance is outstanding. Manufacturing output is up for, I think, the ninth month in a row. It is almost impossible to open a newspaper today without seeing yet another good-news story about our economic statistics. [Interruption.] I hear Labour Members laughing, but let us not forget the state in which they left the economy.

A strong economy, however, must be a strong economy for all, and that is why I am also pleased that wealth inequalities are shrinking and the gap between the richer and the poorer is becoming less enormous.

As I said in my maiden speech, innovation drives growth, and science and research are at the heart of that innovation. I am a member of the Science and Technology Committee. We are in the middle of a digital revolution, the world's fourth industrial revolution. We are world leaders in science and technology, and it is key to our success that we maintain that status. I am therefore delighted that science and research are at the heart of the Government's industrial strategy, and that the commitment to increasing investment in research and development to a massive 2.4% of GDP is coupled with the largest investment in research and innovation by any Government in 40 years.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick): The largest ever.

Vicky Ford: Is it now the largest ever? I thank my hon. Friend.

Those are phenomenal targets, ambitions and spending, but they are coupled with specific, targeted actions to unlock some of the most innovative sectors. It has been

[Vicky Ford]

great to be in the House when we have been discussing how to unlock investment in the next generation's batteries so that we can get the automated vehicles sector up and running and leading the world. My constituency is the home of radio. The first ever radar messages were sent out to the world from Chelmsford. The Space Industry Bill will mean that this country can not only make satellites and be part of their manufacture, but actually launch them.

I also spoke about productivity in my maiden speech, because it is key to our success. I said then that the people of Chelmsford spent too much time sitting in traffic jams and waiting for delayed trains, that it was a waste of their personal time, and that it hit the nation's productivity. I was so pleased yesterday when the Government identified 44 parts of the country that would receive a further £4.4 billion of investment in our roads, railways and infrastructure. My part of Essex is a key element of that. The infrastructure in which the Government are investing will help not just to deliver new housing for the future, but to unlock our productivity and enable people to get on with their lives.

I want to say something about taxation, because it is part of the big picture of how we get the economy working. Under the last Labour Government, I was working as a volunteer charring the local free school. I recall one of my best members of staff coming to me and saying that she had to hand in her notice because she simply could not afford to work any more: she would be better off claiming benefits. Ensuring that the tax system works for those who are on the lowest incomes, and ensuring that work pays, has been key to the Government's success. That is why I am so proud that 4 million people have been taken out of tax altogether, and 24 million, I believe—the figure may have increased—have benefited from tax cuts. The tax gap has in fact narrowed, and those on the lowest incomes are now paying the lowest tax, with those on the highest paying more.

Peter Dowd: Does the hon. Lady agree with the leader of Chelmsford council, Councillor Roy Whitehead, who said that the Government cuts to education were short-sighted?

Vicky Ford: I agree with my council leader in so many ways, but the leader of Chelmsford City Council is not responsible for the education budget; that is covered within the Essex County Council area, where more frontline delivery of children's services is happening every year.

On the issue of tax, it is vital to remember that it is this Government who have made sure that the wealthier pay the largest share of tax, and the top 1% of earners are paying more tax than ever before.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Lady not acknowledge, however, that ONS statistics show that the top decile pays less than the bottom decile? I believe she is talking only about income tax, which is very limited, and not the whole burden of tax.

Vicky Ford: I refer the hon. Lady back to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister's questions yesterday, when she reaffirmed that the top 1% of earners are paying more tax than ever before.

Skills are absolutely vital to our future. I remember that under the last Labour Government over 1 million young people—those under the age of 25—were not in employment, education or training. It was completely shocking, but now youth unemployment is at all-time lows, and that is not by accident. In my constituency, 5,350 young people have started apprenticeships since 2010.

David Linden: I take an interest in this as someone who was an apprentice, and I am also probably the youngest Member taking part in this debate. I absolutely support whatever we can do to get young people into work—[*Interruption.*] The Chief Secretary suggests that the Exchequer Secretary is younger than me. I support getting people into apprenticeships, but does the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) agree that we need to pay them a proper, real national living wage? At the moment under UK law they can still be paid as little as £3.50 an hour. How does it help to build a country that works for everyone when some get paid so little?

Vicky Ford: The benefit of apprenticeships is that apprentices are earning as well as learning. When I met some of those 5,350 young people who are doing apprenticeships in my constituency—especially those in financial services, which I will talk about later—they told me how happy they were to be earning while also learning.

I also recognise that enabling small businesses to take on apprentices is key in some areas. That is why I was so pleased to hear the Chancellor mention in the spring statement new measures to help unlock the opportunities for small businesses to offer apprenticeships.

We must also remember that apprenticeships are not for everyone. Britain is home to some of the world's leading universities—more than any country other than the US. Our universities are the jewel in the British crown. I am a member of the Science and Technology Committee, and we have been hearing from some of those universities. We bring students, researchers and ideas-generators from all over the world here, and it is absolutely key that they can continue to collaborate and work together and with leaders in other worlds. That is why I was so pleased that the Prime Minister talked in her Mansion House speech about a science and innovation pact between the UK and Europe after Brexit. There is still work to do on the detail, but we must ensure that that detail is focused on, which is why it is great that the negotiations in Brussels this week are going to mean we can start the next stage of our discussions.

I want to mention a couple of sectors, the first of which is financial services. It is probably the largest contributor to the tax-take in this country, accounting for about 11% of total tax, with £72 billion paid in tax by the sector last year. It is also really important to remember that this is not just about jobs in London. Even in my constituency of Chelmsford, there are about 2,000 jobs in the insurance sector. That is probably the largest sector there. I travelled to Canary Wharf to listen to the Chancellor's speech on the future trade agreement on financial services. It is key that we get this right, and I am really pleased that we are now focusing on this. The Prime Minister said yesterday how important it will be to have a bespoke deal on services and financial services.

Another sector that I want to mention is the life sciences sector. We are the world leader in many areas of medical research, which makes a £30 billion contribution to the economy and provides 480,000 jobs. None of this has happened by accident. It was here that the human genome was discovered, and the human genome campus is here. The previous Prime Minister's visionary 100,000 Genomes Project signalled the start of a massive revolution in medical research. There are, however, a few areas in which we could do a bit more to unlock the benefits of that research. The first involves unlocking the benefits of medical research for the NHS. There is still a bit more that we could do to get the synergies working together there.

I should like to advertise something to the House. Immediately after this debate, I am going to be leading the Adjournment debate, in which I will be looking at a very rare disease that affects one of my constituents. No other Member has debated this before. To help medical research in our life sciences sector, we need to ensure that new treatments are not only discovered here but trialled, tested and prescribed here. That is what I shall be discussing with Members later.

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Lady is making a very good case about where the UK stands on the life sciences and other sciences, but does she not recognise that a lot of this work—including that being done at the rheumatoid arthritis pathogenesis centre of excellence at the University of Glasgow, which I visited recently—depends on European collaboration, on researchers and funding coming from the EU, and on being able to share excellence in techniques?

Vicky Ford: Absolutely. I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention, because I was the only British MEP involved in the negotiations on the last European collaborative research project. I was pleased to hear the Minister responsible for science and research confirming that he intends to continue that type of collaboration—provided that it is still focused on excellence, value for money and so on—as part of the science and innovation pact that the Prime Minister intends to deliver. This sector is vital, and we need to ensure that our world-leading scientists can continue to work easily with those in other areas.

My final thought is—[*Interruption.*] No, I have got my new medical school. This is an enormously important year, because it is 100 years since women got the vote, and it is also the Year of Engineering. I want hon. Members to focus for a moment on young women considering careers in engineering. This country needs 20,000 more engineers every year, and we absolutely need to invest in our science, technology, maths and engineering skills. The number of professional women engineers in this country is shockingly low. Only one in 10 are female, a lower figure than in nearly all the other European countries. There are fantastically good reasons why girls should go into engineering. One third of all businesses say that they want to recruit more people with STEM skills, and women who study science tend to earn an average of 30% more than their peers. A recent study said that 85% of women engineers were either happy or very happy—

Elizabeth Truss *rose*—

Vicky Ford: I will give way to my right hon. Friend, because she has done something amazing in relation to maths skills.

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with my colleague on the vital importance of more girls studying maths. Does she agree that we should encourage girls who are considering their A-level options at the moment to think about studying maths A-level, because their school will get an extra £600 maths premium if they make that excellent decision not only for their own future but for the future of the country?

Vicky Ford: I am so delighted that my right hon. Friend has said that, because that is exactly the point. The Government have done a transformational thing by saying that we will give schools £600 more for every pupil who studies maths, which will be great at getting more pupils to choose the subject. However, if I may say so, the issue is not just with maths, but with physics. Forty per cent. of pupils studying maths are girls, but the figure for physics is only one in five. The last, tiny tweak that I would like in the autumn Budget would be for the premium to apply to physics, too.

3.10 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): It is real pleasure to close this debate for the Opposition and, it is a pleasure, as always, to follow the words of the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). Like me, she entered this Parliament from the European Parliament, and while I may not always agree with everything she says, I know that she says it with a great deal of sincerity.

I am sure that we will all remember, back in 2010, when George Osborne, in his first speech as Chancellor to the Conservative party conference, maintained that we are

“all in this together.”

As he put it:

“The public must know that the burden”—

of deficit reduction—

“is being fairly shared.”

But opinion polls show that the public know that the opposite has occurred over the past eight years. The Conservatives have failed to deal with the long-term problems of our economy, at the same time as peoples' living standards continue to fall. The Government have failed time and again—four times, precisely—to be on track to meet their own deficit elimination targets. The figures presented in the spring statement last week were hailed by the Chancellor as a turning point and, if I may say so, we had the same hubristic performance from the Government Front Bench today.

Closer examination reveals a deeply disturbing picture—a “lean, mean” picture, to use the perhaps rather ill-chosen phrase of the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling). Public sector borrowing is still higher than was forecast a year ago, and debt is over £700 billion higher than when the Conservatives came to power. It is not “talking Britain down” to point out that the UK is headed for lower-than-expected growth by 2020 and 2021, as noted by the OBR. Expectations are not being exceeded, as suggested by the hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair), but dashed.

[Anneliese Dodds]

I note that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury did not mention economic growth once. Perhaps the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), will come on to that in his final remarks, and I hope so because the Opposition believe, and many economists agree, that a significant reason for the lower-than-expected growth is the UK's lower-than-expected productivity rates, with productivity increases having been revised down for 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2022. In fact, in 2017, business investment—a core element of improving productivity—was half its average level between 2010 and 2015.

Last year, economic growth in Britain was the slowest in the G7, which is in contrast with the situation when Labour left office. I take up the suggestion of the hon. Member for Chelmsford to remember the situation when Labour left office, because I do not want to forget it. When Labour left office, the economy was growing rapidly, and the second quarter of 2010 saw the fastest growth since 2008. Our economy recovered after the crash under Labour, and we have had eight wasted years that have led to a lower trajectory of growth than under Labour. It is necessary to look at the facts and to discover how this Government have slowed our economy, particularly in international comparisons.

The Opposition are the real optimists. When we look at our economy's performance and compare it with those of other OECD and G7 nations, we see that we are not fulfilling our potential. That is holding our citizens and our country back. We can do so much better. We do not want to just talk things up, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) advocates; we want to make them better. That is the difference between our position and that of the Government.

The Government's economic policies have clearly failed on their own terms, but in addition the pain of deficit reduction—to the extent that deficit reduction has occurred—has not been equally distributed. I return to that conference speech by George Osborne, painful as it may be for the Government. In that speech, he stated that he would impose a permanent tax on banks, and that he would stick with the 50p tax rate for the highest earners. This Conservative Government have done the opposite. Just a few weeks ago, Labour gave the Conservatives the chance to reverse their reduction in the banking levy, to release funds to fill the gaping hole in children's services, and they refused. In an eloquent and well-informed speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya) drew attention to the enormous stress that is being placed on children's services in Peterborough. She is a very strong advocate for those children in her area.

Overall, this Government will have cut taxes for the best-off and for profitable corporations to the tune of £70 billion over the course of this Parliament. The Government have also failed to tackle illicit financial flows vigorously enough, as the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) said. I can reveal to the House today, as a result of my own work and research, that this Government have lost the eye-watering sum of £2.2 billion by failing to tackle the problem of Scottish limited partnerships. That is a problem that many of us have been raising for many months, but the Government have not got a grip on it, and furthermore, they have not dealt with it through fines. They have lost £2.2 billion.

Everyone, aside from the very best-off, has felt the pinch from this Government's approach. As many have mentioned, real wages continue to fall. We have had a tiny tick up—the first for very many months—but overall we have had the longest squeeze in wages in this country since Napoleonic times. Indeed, we learned yesterday that, according to the Office for National Statistics, the average worker now brings home about £15 less a week than they did before the financial crisis. Nurses, teachers, police and other public sector workers had their pay frozen until recently. The cost of lifting the cap for the police had to be found from existing funds; and it remains to be seen whether decent pay for nurses will be at the expense of terms and conditions. Teachers and other public sector workers must struggle on as their wages become increasingly out of step with the cost of living.

All that, of course, is before even mentioning the omnishambles of this Government's approach to Brexit. I have lost count of the number of business people I have spoken to who are incredulous at the Government's lack of grip on the negotiation process, and their ideological decision to rule out potential membership of a customs union. But it is all right; we learned today from the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), to whom I am most grateful, that we can solve all these problems with just “a bit of electronics”. So that is fine. Just a bit of electronics and it will all be fine.

David Linden: Sorted.

Anneliese Dodds: All sorted.

The worst impacts have been concentrated on the least well-off people. Earlier this month, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission published its report, “The cumulative impact of tax and welfare reforms”. The report showed, on the basis of the commission's exhaustive research and modelling, that overall, changes to taxes, benefits, tax credits and universal credit announced since 2010 have been regressive, however measured. Those in the bottom two deciles have lost, on average, approximately 10% of their net income, with much smaller losses for those higher up the income distribution.

The hon. Member for Chelmsford is usually very accurate and committed to accuracy, but I regret having to say that perhaps she needs to look again at the latest figures around taxation. Indeed, the Prime Minister was wrong on this. I was in a television studio with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury when I heard what the Prime Minister said, and the Prime Minister was incorrect on this. The most recent ONS statistics show that the best-off people pay 34% of their gross income in tax, and the worst-off 10% pay 42% of their gross income in tax under this Government. That is the reality. Yes, those at the top may pay more income tax, but the overall tax burden is unequal and regressive, and this Government are doing nothing to deal with that.

Moreover, the analysis by the Equality and Human Rights Commission showed that the changes put in place by the Conservative and coalition Governments will have a disproportionately negative impact on several protected groups, including disabled people, certain ethnic minorities and women. Appallingly—I will finish on this—for households with at least one disabled adult and a disabled child the average annual cash losses are just over £6,500—more than 13% of average net income for those families has been lost since 2010. The hon.

Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami), who is no longer in his place, stated that his Government were focused on practically achieving the best outcomes for people. Perhaps he can tell me and other Opposition Members, and indeed his constituents, how that loss represents a good outcome for disabled people. To use the buzzword of the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), the economy has been reset—it has been reset in the wrong direction.

I note that this Government are also trying to reset their economic language. We did not hear this during the debate, but perhaps we will hear it in the Minister's closing remarks. We no longer hear from the Government about poverty according to its usual definition, which traditionally, in Britain, has been relative poverty. Now they will talk only about absolute poverty, because they know that when we talk about relative poverty, the usual measure in this country and internationally, we see that we are sliding backwards.

That is the legacy of this Government: tax cuts for the best-off, and reduced incomes for disabled people and those on average and low salaries. Another approach is possible; and it is the approach that Labour has developed. It is one that we have costed, unlike the Government in relation to many of their current items of spending. We need to have a Britain that is growing sustainably at a rate comparable to that of other countries like ours, rather than lagging behind them. We need to have a Britain that halts the scourge of child poverty, which will soar by 1 million children under this Government unless checked. We need a Britain that truly enables the potential of everyone. That is ambition, and we would like the Government to start listening to it.

3.22 pm

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick):

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions today. We have heard a succession of Opposition Members espousing doom and gloom. There was one honourable exception—the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). In that cocktail was mixed a dose of collective amnesia about the legacy of the last Labour Government. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), could not even acknowledge the incredible, unprecedented economic success of her own constituency, where, thanks to this Government, we have seen record jobs levels and record levels of low unemployment. In the spring statement, we heard about further progress with the great Oxford to Cambridge and Milton Keynes corridor, one of the greatest growth and prosperity generators this country has ever seen. The shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd), a proud Liverpudlian, could not bring himself to acknowledge the investment we are seeing in Liverpool. Well, this son of a Liverpudlian will tell him that there is unprecedented foreign and domestic investment being made into Liverpool's ports. We even heard an unprovoked attack on Tigger by the shadow Chief Secretary—this time, of course, I do not mean on the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

What a difference we heard in the contributions from Conservative Members. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) set out a bold plan—a vision for economic renewal as we leave the EU. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) invoked the legacy of Margaret Thatcher, going further

than she ever went, exhorting us to take advantage of the opportunities presented by Brexit. We believe that Brexit will not determine the future of this country—rather, it is about the choices we make next. We are going to ensure that those choices are the right ones and that they are pro-innovation and pro-growth.

What infectious enthusiasm my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) shows for his constituency. What a difference a Conservative representative makes. I knew I was making a good investment in Clacton when I went there to support him in 2014. I am afraid it took him a little longer to come to this place, but we in the Conservative party believe in making long-term rather than short-term investment. He could not be a member of the class of 2014, but he did get in a few years later.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) a devastating critique of the SNP's failing economic record and about the fact that the greatest, most enduring and important single market that this country has ever known is the single market of the United Kingdom, which we will always support.

Six themes emerged in the debate. First, of fundamental importance to us all—our central mission since the Conservatives arrived at the Treasury in 2010 and found that note on the desk saying that there was no money left—has been to restore the public finances so that we can live within our means and provide the confidence and credibility that every economy requires. We need that confidence to create the jobs, which have been created, to secure the inward investment, which is at record levels, and to keep interest rates low so that people can stay in their homes and continue to have economic security. We will continue to work towards that, today and in future.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said at the spring statement, debt is now forecast to be nearly 1% lower than at the autumn Budget, and we will see the first sustained fall in debt for 17 years. That is a turning point in the nation's recovery from the financial crisis that was left to us in 2010.

We have heard today about manufacturing, which is enjoying its longest period of sustained growth for a generation. UK foreign direct investment is leading Europe—it is third in the world behind only the United States and China—and is continuing to grow, even after the Brexit referendum. What do we hear from Labour Members on that? That they have learned nothing. We heard a series of bad puns and jokes with which the shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Bootle, managed to outdo his usual record. The Labour party would destroy the credibility that we have built up over the past few years. It does not know how to manage an economy. The last time the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), managed anything was before I was even born—and then he was sacked by Ken Livingstone for being too left wing.

Secondly, we have heard how, as a result of our hard-won economic credibility, we have secured the prize of record high levels of employment and record low levels of unemployment. Nothing matters more to our constituents than the dignity and security of a job. More young people, women and disabled people are enjoying employment. Some 3 million more jobs have been created and there are more jobs in every region and nation of the United Kingdom.

Anneliese Dodds: Does the Minister acknowledge that under his Government, record levels of in-work poverty are affecting children?

Robert Jenrick: I am surprised that the hon. Lady cannot bring herself to welcome what I have just described, even in her own constituency, where jobs and employment are booming—

Anneliese Dodds: Answer the question.

Robert Jenrick: I will come to the hon. Lady's point.

It is not just important to us to create a country of working people; it is our mission to create a nation of well-paid people in secure and fulfilling careers. We are doing that by tackling the root causes of our low national productivity as no Government have done before. We are seeing some positive signs. Inflation is falling—it fell from 3% to 2.7% in February—and the OBR has said that it will keep falling, leading to real wage growth.

Alison Thewliss: Two thirds of children in poverty are in working families. Does the Minister regard that as a positive sign?

Robert Jenrick: I am proud of the fact that more people are in work. When I go back to my constituency, Newark in the north midlands, where unemployment is currently at 1%, I am proud of our record and that more families are enjoying the key ingredients of economic security: a job and a reliable wage.

John Redwood: Did the Minister notice that the hon. Members for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) and for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) on the Opposition Front Benches failed to remind the House that many people on lower incomes have been taken out of income tax altogether, that the living wage has been raised so we are dealing with this issue of low pay, and that inequality, as normally measured, has come down? Why do they never mention those things?

Robert Jenrick: My right hon. Friend makes a series of important points. Let us look at them. By increasing employment and reducing unemployment, we have sought not just to increase employment, but to tackle those people who are on the lowest wages and secure a better tax environment for them. The living wage will rise to £7.83 next month, which is £2,000 more for the average person in full-time employment.

David Linden: I am most grateful to the Minister for giving way. I hope that he will clarify to the House that that rise in the national living wage—and indeed the national living wage itself—does not apply to those under 25. Will he clarify that for Hansard?

Robert Jenrick: Our priority is to ensure that younger people in the workplace gain the skills that they need in good and secure employment and then, in time, they will benefit from the living wage, which did not exist before this Government created it. We have increased the personal allowance; we have taken 4 million British people out of tax altogether; and we have reduced the tax of 31 million of our fellow citizens.

On the subject of fair taxation, which was raised, the top 1% are paying 27% of the income tax in this country. On the subject of enforcing tax and reducing avoidance and evasion, the tax gap in this country is at its smallest ever level. It is one of the smallest of any developed country in the world and it is certainly smaller than the previous Labour Government left it. The bottom 20% of earners—this is an important statistic—have seen real wages increase by 7% since 2015. We have high levels of employment and we are working hard to support the lowest paid in society.

Thirdly, we have addressed productivity by investing in skills to ensure that our workers and fellow citizens have the skills that they need for the jobs of the future. We have seen that in many of the measures that we have discussed today: in increasing vocational and technical education; in our apprenticeships; in the advent of T-levels, one of the greatest innovations in our secondary education system since the creation of the A-level; in increasing numeracy and digital skills in schools with maths teachers, with IT teachers and with coding at primary level; and in the creation of the national retraining partnership—a partnership between the Government, the private sector, the CBI and the TUC, which was launched last month by the Chancellor—to ensure that workers have the skills that they require as the world of work changes in the years to come.

For small businesses and family businesses, we have increased management training and skills training, so that the greatest innovation in our economy is diffused throughout the regions and to the smallest businesses, we are backing people such as Sir Charlie Mayfield with his Be the Business movement, and we are undertaking a review of the long tail of British businesses, which was announced by the Chancellor in the spring statement. All of that will help to ensure that productivity increases in all parts of the United Kingdom and in all parts of the economy. What are the early results of those efforts? We have 2 million more children in good or outstanding schools than in 2010.

Fourthly, addressing productivity also requires us to invest in our infrastructure. The level of infrastructure investment—both public and private—by the end of this Parliament will be greater than at any time since the 1970s.

Peter Dowd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for mentioning my constituency earlier. I would like to mention his if he does not mind. Roger Blaney, the leader of Newark and Sherwood District Council, was speaking in response to a report that ranked the district near the foot of the social mobility league table. He put Newark and Sherwood “323rd out of 324 local authority areas based on factors such as education outcomes, employability and housing prospects.”

Does the Minister still think that he is doing a good job for his own area?

Robert Jenrick: I most certainly do. That report revealed decades of underinvestment and neglect by Labour councils in Nottinghamshire, which let down their old former coalfield communities—the communities that they have taken for granted for too long. We are changing that, and the policies of this Government have seen, in my constituency, 40% more young people in good or outstanding schools, and a new free school in Newark, which I have created and of which I am proud to be a governor. Those are the practical changes that will

transform the lives of local people. In the midlands and the north, we do not take them for granted; we get things done for them.

We are making long-term investments in infrastructure—road, rail, broadband and mobile—in all parts of the United Kingdom. The Infrastructure and Projects Authority, which measures our spending in those areas, said that there will be more central Government investment in the north of England over the course of this Parliament than in London or the south-east. We have created a pipeline of £600 billion of investment in construction and other infrastructure. The challenge now is less about money and more about ensuring that we have the construction workers and skills that we need to deliver on those projects. We are backing the midlands engine, the northern powerhouse and the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge opportunity. We are creating new deals in Sheffield, hopefully in the borderlands between England and Scotland, in north Wales and in other parts of the United Kingdom, where we believe in allowing local people to have greater say over their own lives. The Mayors whose positions we created—including Andy Street and, in the Tees Valley, Ben Houchen—are already making a huge impact and putting their own areas on the map.

Fifthly, we are embracing new technology, not turning away from it. We want to ensure that the United Kingdom leads the world in the technological revolution, but we also want to ensure that that works for everyone as the world of work changes profoundly. The pace of change has never been faster, but it will never be so slow again. The tech entrepreneurs and investors I meet are not preoccupied by Brexit. Their eyes are fixed on the horizon and so are ours. This is true of companies in FinTech, life sciences, artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles and electric cars, and green growth, all of which we are taking seriously in our industrial strategy and in other policies. At least 15 UK tech companies could float today for in excess of \$1 billion—companies that did not exist five or 10 years ago, including Citymapper, Deliveroo and Farfetch. This country is on the cusp of something great and we do not want the Labour party to lose that.

Peter Dowd: Does the Minister agree with Councillor Blaney that his constituency is the “Cinderella of regional funding”? What is he doing about that?

Robert Jenrick: Well, we have been investing in all parts of the United Kingdom, including the east midlands. We created the midlands engine, which I just mentioned and which is designed to unleash the economic potential of the midlands. In the west midlands, we have seen the huge potential that Andy Street has now given to a city that has been run by the Labour party for too long.

What are we doing to invest in new technology? As my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) described, we are investing more in research and development than has been invested since the 1970s, when the statistics were first recorded, so we are probably investing more than has ever been invested in modern times. We have made the R&D tax credits more generous. We are investing in the enterprise investment scheme and the entrepreneurs’ relief that are so important to crowd in investment to the United Kingdom from all over the world. The Chancellor is today at the FinTech summit that the Treasury is hosting, with 600 investors

from all over the world coming to the United Kingdom to see some of our most exciting business that are creating 60,000 new jobs in the FinTech sector alone.

What have we done to create a business environment? We have lowered capital gains tax and corporation tax, and committed to lowering it still further. Labour would reverse those changes. Our reductions in corporation tax have actually resulted in more tax revenue for the Treasury and more money for public services. That is prosperity over ideology.

Anneliese Dodds: I am sure that the Minister wants to be accurate on these matters. Therefore, perhaps he will slightly correct his suggestion that the increased revenue was due to the reduction in corporation tax. So many commentators—including, I believe, the IFS—have said that the increase in revenue is due to, for example, banks returning to profitability, and it should not be connected with the reduction in rate.

Robert Jenrick: In the Treasury we try to deal in facts, rather than in comments, and the effect of reducing corporation tax has been an increase in revenue.

The Chief Secretary and other Conservative Members have said that we must make the case once again for free markets—something we thought we might never have to do again. However, as Margaret Thatcher and, I think, Tony Benn—an unusual pairing—used to say, “There are no final victories in politics, and if you want to continue to win important arguments, you have to keep making them and restating them over and over again.” The case for free markets is threatened as never before by the hard-left, heirloom policies and personalities of Labour Front Benchers. As someone who used to work in the auction business, I can spot an antique a mile away.

The central battle on this conflicting vision of our society is being fought again. That matters for two reasons. First, just as our parents and grandparents paid the price for this ideology last time it was employed in this country, we do not want our children and grandchildren to pay the price for its resurrection today. Last time, it left us a weak country saddled with debt and high taxes, unable and unwilling to embrace new technology or to invest in public services—and working people paid the price.

Secondly, to paraphrase Robert Kennedy, living in a democracy is not merely about the absence of tyranny but the presence of freedom. A free market matters to us and our constituents not just because we have learned that it is the best way to run an economy but because it underpins all our other freedoms. That is why we will continue to defend it as we build an economy and a country that works for everyone.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Let me just say to the Front Benchers that if they agree 10 minutes, they should stick to that, because I do not want it to break down in future with people taking advantage by allowing the Opposition to have 10 minutes and then you carry on for 17 minutes. I think we have to be fair to both sides. If we make agreements, let us please stick to them. If it is 15 minutes, I do not mind, but at least let us be honest with each other when we make those decisions.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the economy.

PETITION

Royal Bank of Scotland Closure

3.41 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Ten years ago, the people of Campbeltown and the Kintyre peninsula, along with taxpayers throughout the United Kingdom, were forced to bail out Royal Bank of Scotland to the tune of £50 billion. Now, without any prior consultation with the local community, Royal Bank of Scotland plans to close its branch in Campbeltown. Just before Christmas, I launched a petition in the town opposing that planned closure. That petition has gathered hundreds of local signatures.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Campbeltown & Kintyre,

Declares that proposed closure of the Campbeltown branch of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland will have a detrimental effect on local and surrounding communities and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take in account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of this branch.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002126]

Phenylketonuria and Kuvan

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

3.43 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I would like to bring to the House's attention the condition known as phenylketonuria and the drug sapropterin, which is known under the trade name Kuvan. I very much thank my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) for being here today; he raised the same matter in an Adjournment debate six years ago. I also thank the Minister—another fantastic Essex MP—for being present, as well as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who has a constituent with the condition. I co-chair the all-party group on rare, genetic and undiagnosed conditions, but I raise this issue primarily as a constituency MP.

This is my first Adjournment debate, and I would like to discuss the case of one of my youngest constituents. It was at one of my first constituency surgeries that I met Natasha Cotter, who told me about her daughter, Cait. Cait and her father are in the Gallery. Cait has phenylketonuria, otherwise known as PKU. It is very, very rare.

I am sure that all of us who are parents remember those first moments when we hold our new-born baby in our arms before it is taken away and given the heel-prick test. For the vast majority of children, that test is clear, but for one in 10,000 babies, it will show that the child has PKU. Without treatment, these children can become very suddenly and very seriously ill.

People with PKU cannot metabolise phenylalanine, an amino acid found in protein. Without correct treatment, the amino acid can build up to levels that are toxic to the brain. If PKU is unmanaged, it results in severe and irreversible brain damage. The treatment for children affected is to remove almost all natural protein from their diet.

My constituent Cait is 10 years old. She can metabolise only 11 grams of protein a day. She is restricted in every eating experience of her life. Her day is ruled by limited food and constant protein supplements—those drinks taste foul and smell unpleasant. When other children are sharing a meal, or perhaps a birthday cake or chocolate, Cait can only have her protein drink. Her parents tell me that she is permanently hungry. They say that every day since she was born has been filled with the joy that she brings, but also the misery associated with the daily management of her lifetime condition.

The severe restrictions of a PKU diet place a great burden on patients and their families. The phenylalanine content of all food needs to be carefully restricted, including with vegetables such as potatoes and cauliflower. Cait's grandmother has given up work to care for her. In fact, research shows that more than half of the carers of a child with PKU have stopped working, reduced their hours or changed their job so that they can help to manage the child's diet. Unsurprisingly, the constant worry about what their children are eating, and whether brain damage may be caused by everyday food, puts a huge emotional strain on families. A recent study found that 59% of mothers caring for PKU children had clinical levels of psychological distress themselves. Furthermore, problems with learning difficulties are

frequently reported in children with PKU. A survey of families found that 43% of children had problems staying focused at school, with 30% of families reporting that their child had depression or anxiety.

But there is hope. For one month, Cait was put on a trial of sapropterin, a drug made by BioMarin and marketed under the name Kuvan. During that trial, Cait's ability to metabolise phenylalanine increased threefold from 400 mg to 1,200 mg a day—the equivalent of 24 grams of protein—which allowed Cait to eat a normal vegetarian diet. Her parents told me that she was a different child and so happy to be able to eat real food. Even a visit to the supermarket was a real adventure. Her mood lifted, the nightmares stopped and she increased in alertness. Her teacher asked what had changed, because she was a different pupil at school.

Sapropterin is the only licensed non-dietary treatment for PKU. It does not work for all genetic variants of the condition, but it benefits about 20% to 30% of sufferers. That is a tiny number of people: about 150 children in the whole country, or, including adults, fewer than 350. These people are so rare, but for those such as Cait, the drug is life changing.

Sapropterin is available in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Ukraine, as well as the United States of America. However, except for a small number of women during pregnancy, it is not available in England on the NHS.

I have written to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to draw Cait's case to his attention. I have also written to my local NHS clinical commissioning group, which sent me to NHS England. NHS England recommended an individual funding request, but for such a request to be successful, the patient has to be considered exceptional. So far, only those with additional conditions have been able to access the drug via that route. The patient has to prove that they have PKU and another condition, but how likely is that? PKU children are exceptionally rare—there are only 150 of them in the country—so they are already exceptional. For patients such as Cait, this is an impossible barrier. In fact, I have been told that only three patients have ever successfully managed to be prescribed the drug through an individual funding request.

Last summer, NHS England said that it would review the decision on sapropterin. Last month, it wrote to the patient organisation, the National Society for Phenylketonuria, to say that the decision would now be made by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Last week, the patient organisation wrote back to NHS England because it is not clear what process will be used or when the decision process will begin.

I understand that funding for all treatments is not unlimited and that decisions do need to be made in a rational manner, but patients with PKU believe that, as well as the positive health benefits, there would be positive financial benefits to the public purse from commissioning this drug. The NHS estimates that Kuvan could cost between £14,000 and £45,000 per patient per year, but BioMarin, the manufacturer, has told the patient organisation that it is willing to make substantial discounts.

Furthermore, the price needs to be weighed against the costs of not having the drug. For adults, the protein-restricted diet alone costs the NHS £12,000 a year. The average cost to the taxpayer of each parent who gives up work to care for their child is another £5,500. A third of children need additional help at school, the cost of which varies, but the typical notional budget for a child with special educational needs is another £6,000.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am not normally in the Chamber for the Adjournment debate on a Thursday afternoon, but I am here today because of the timing of this debate and because, as my party's spokesperson on health, I am very interested in this subject. The hon. Lady has very passionately, and in a forensic and detailed way, outlined the case for making this drug available. Not only does the individual need the drug, but the family sometimes need it as well, because of the mental and physical impact the situation has on them. I support the hon. Lady's request that the Minister makes this happen. For 150 people, it is a small price to pay. As the hon. Lady said, when we add it all up, the good health of a child or an adult is worth such a price.

Vicky Ford: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his comments. I completely agree that we need to look at the wider issues. In fact, we should also look at what happens if the condition is not successfully managed, because that can be even more expensive. For example, if a woman with PKU gets pregnant and the condition is not well managed, the child she bears will be at very high risk of having substantial long-term disabilities. If a child with PKU does not manage to stick to their diet, they are at risk of permanent brain damage. All those wider costs should be taken into consideration when making this assessment.

The patient organisation is concerned that NICE may decide to restrict the drug and offer it only to those it considers to be high-need patients. The drug might be given only to patients who have refused to follow the strict diet, so it would actually discriminate against those who have done the right thing and worked so hard to maintain that very difficult dietary control. I say to the Minister: let us try to break this deadlock. BioMarin and NICE need to engage with each other in a transparent way that has the full support of the patient organisation. The whole patient population should be considered, and those who do the right thing with their diet should not be put at a disadvantage.

There is a bigger issue. This is not just a debate about one patient or one drug, but a wider one about how we in Britain approach new medicines and treatments, especially for rare diseases. Britain is a world leader in science, especially the life sciences, and we are home to the human genome campus. The amazing, visionary 100,000 genomes project has set us at the forefront of the global revolution in medical research. Our unique NHS gives researchers the ability to access large quantities of reliable and detailed patient data, which helps them to identify very, very specific genetic divergences. That means that medics can increasingly pinpoint the exact cause of a rare condition, and discover specifically which one of a new generation of personalised medicines will give the most effective treatment for an individual's condition. Life sciences lie at the heart of the Government's industrial policy. However, if we are to

[Vicky Ford]

stay at the forefront of world medical research, it is vital that discoveries are not only made here, but trialled, tested, and prescribed here.

NICE is a world leader in assessing medical health technology, and many other countries have chosen to follow its approach. Nevertheless, the world of medical research is changing exponentially, and if NICE is to continue to hold the confidence of researchers, physicians and patients, it must prove that it can evolve and evaluate even the most innovative treatments, and especially advanced medicines such as cell and gene therapies. When NICE approves a new treatment, we must ensure that the NHS can commission it effectively. Today the NHS cannot commission a drug unless it has been to NICE. Before a drug is granted marketing authorisation, there is the option for the company to make it available through the early access to medicines scheme, but after that marketing authorisation, and before NICE approval, there is no route to funding except through individual funding requests.

As the Minister knows, most rare diseases are very, very rare—at least some of them are—and the overall cost of treating them is a small part of the NHS budget. We must find a better way for all parties to work together to facilitate the passage of orphan drugs for rare conditions through NICE and the commissioning process.

I thank colleagues and the Minister for listening to my remarks, and I thank the Cotter family for being here today. Britain is a world leader in medical research, so let us ensure that British patients, such as my constituent, Cait, can be among the first in the world, not the last, to benefit from medical discoveries.

3.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham—

Vicky Ford: Chelmsford.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I am sorry—I ought to know it is Chelmsford because my hon. Friend is a near neighbour of mine, and I thank her for the passionate and articulate way that she made her case this afternoon. I am proud that it is I who am responding to her first Adjournment debate, because she and I go back a long way. I hope to give her some comfort from the fact that we are taking into consideration some of the issues she has raised today. I also thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) who made an articulate pitch on behalf of the families of those who suffer from rare diseases. We must always remember that we are dealing not just with the person who has the condition, and that the burden on their family can often be as great, if not greater.

My hon. Friend has secured this debate on phenylketonuria and its treatment with Kuvan, and she set out some concerns on behalf of all PKU patients, which I hope to address. The importance of addressing rare diseases, of which PKU is one, is increasingly recognised by policy makers and healthcare service providers, not just in the UK but worldwide. Mercifully, the numbers of patients suffering from each rare disease can be small, but collectively 3.5 million people in the

UK alone are affected by rare diseases. To put that number in context, 1 in 17 people will suffer from a rare disease at some point in their life.

The Government are dedicated to improving the life of patients with rare diseases, and that is laid down in our promise to implement the 51 commitments of the UK strategy for rare diseases, which includes the need to take account of new evidence that may emerge as a result of research and development.

Many rare diseases are present at birth or soon after and PKU is no exception. We understand that PKU has an estimated prevalence of one in every 10,000 births. We know that without treatment early in life the outlook for those born with PKU is very poor. Without appropriate treatment, as my hon. Friend outlined, people will develop severe learning disabilities which may lead them to require constant care. With treatment, however, the outlook can be good. Screening therefore has a vital role in early and accurate diagnosis. The current new-born screening programme in the UK is based on the blood spot, or heel prick, test and screens for nine rare conditions, including PKU. Treatment can then start straight away, minimising the risk of serious complications. As I understand it, for patients with PKU this treatment includes a special diet, confining intake to low protein food and regular blood tests, as my hon. Friend explained.

I recognise that this protein-restricted diet can be very limiting and particularly difficult for children to adhere to. Young patients with PKU cannot eat many of the enjoyable foods that we all eat each and every day, such as meats, milk, cheese and fish. That undoubtedly puts a strain on patients like Cait and their families—I am very pleased that they are here witnessing the debate today—and can make simple day-to-day activities such as going to school or meeting friends a significant challenge. I also appreciate the immense pressure it must put on parents and carers to deny a child the pleasure of choosing and eating a wide range of food on a daily basis.

We all understand the desire of young patients to live a regular life, and eat any food and not have to worry about consequences. However, because of the extremely limited number of naturally low phenylalanine foods available to PKU patients, mainly fruit and vegetables, they also need supplements to meet daily energy requirements, add bulk to their diet and increase variety. My hon. Friend outlined some of the protein shakes they have to rely on to do that. The availability of low-protein foods and nutritional supplements through the NHS is still very important and has, since its development by Birmingham Children's hospital in the 1950s, saved the lives and improved the outcomes of many PKU patients.

Let me move on to address the specific point my hon. Friend made about Kuvan, which has been found to lower blood phenylalanine levels in some patients with mild or moderate PKU. As highlighted today and in previous debates, this drug is unfortunately only effective in some patients. It is entirely dependent on their particular genetic make-up and is more likely to benefit those with the milder forms of PKU. In those cases where patients respond to treatment with Kuvan, it means they are still likely to be required to continue with some form of dietary restriction.

NHS England currently has a policy on the use of Kuvan for the management of PKU during pregnancy. It is targeted at PKU patients who are not able to

establish low levels through dietary control alone. Keeping mums-to-be safe is of great clinical importance to prevent maternal PKU syndrome and lifetime adverse consequences for their babies, the worry of which may further increase a mother's anxiety around pregnancy and the worry about the developing baby.

The reason why Kuvan is currently not routinely commissioned for use in children and adults is the lack of evidence of its effectiveness on nutritional status and cognitive development at the time the policy was developed in 2015. However, if doctors treating a patient think they would benefit from treatment with Kuvan, clinicians are able to make an individual patient funding request, as my hon. Friend said. I appreciate that what my hon. Friend is asking for today is a bigger change than that, beyond access for an individual patient—namely, a wish to see a change to the commissioning policy on Kuvan for use in children and adults that respond to the drug. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, it is important to take account of new evidence and developments as they emerge. I am happy to report that NHS England has received a preliminary policy proposal for the use of Kuvan in the management of PKU for adults and children, as new evidence has now been published to support its use. That was considered by the clinical panel in January, where it was agreed that NHS England should undertake a further review. NHS England is now working with NICE to agree the best approach and has asked it to consider developing advice on the use of Kuvan. I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that this is a positive step in the right direction.

I also agree with my hon. Friend about the need for good stakeholder engagement. Taking stakeholder views into account is vital in any decision-making process. That will involve members of the public and patients, including Cait and her family, as well as all families this will have an impact on. I was very pleased to hear make the point about BioMarin, the manufacturer of Kuvan, being open to negotiation on the pricing of the drug. That is extremely welcome news. Indeed, as part of any review process, manufacturers will be able to offer a

patient access scheme to NICE, and the price offered is then considered to determine the cost-effectiveness of a drug.

I hope I have reassured the House today that the discussion on access to Kuvan is actively being considered. The Department will follow the upcoming work by NICE and NHS England with great interest as they consider the impact of new evidence on commissioning policy. I emphasise that research is crucial to improving our knowledge of rare diseases and to working towards better treatment of them, and I am pleased that the UK is recognised as one of the leading countries for research into rare diseases. In July 2017, the chief medical officer published her landmark report, setting out a vision for genomic medicine in the UK.

The Government have accepted the report in full and responded with the establishment of a national genomics board chaired by my colleague, Lord O'Shaughnessy. I hope that this reassures my hon. Friend and the House about the Government's commitment to supporting research, aiming to bring real change to the way we understand and treat rare diseases. We are in a fantastic position in the UK, at the forefront of that science, and our patients play a vital role in challenging us as policy makers, healthcare professionals and researchers to find new treatments for the benefit of all.

In conclusion, we will ensure that we harness the remarkable prospects that these new developments present for the benefit of our rare diseases patients. We will look more closely at Kuvan. NHS England and NICE will review the new evidence and will engage with BioMarin to consider whether Kuvan should be made available more widely.

I am very grateful once again to my hon. Friend for highlighting these issues. In closing, perhaps through her I can extend my very best wishes to Cait and her family as she battles with this disease.

Question put and agreed to.

4.7 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 22 March 2018

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

Improving Air Quality

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE, HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

1.30 pm

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): We shall begin with the Select Committee statement. Neil Parish will speak on the publication of the joint report “Improving air quality” for up to 10 minutes, during which time no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call, in order, the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, the Chair and the Health and Social Care Committee and the Chair of the Transport Committee.

Other Members may then put questions to Neil Parish. I will call him to respond to each of those in turn. Members can expect to be called only once. The Select Committee Chairs will be given more time, but if they can formulate their statement in the form of a question, that would be helpful. I now call the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Neil Parish.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Thank you, Mr Stringer. It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, I think for the first time. It is good that you had the benefit of being on the Joint Committee during the inquiry. I assure Members that I will not speak for 10 minutes, so as to allow more time for questions. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for facilitating this statement on our recent report, “Improving air quality”.

Before we begin, I am reminded that a year ago my Committee was taking evidence from the Minister when we were called to a Division. The unthinkable happened. We all stand here today because of the unflinching bravery of those on the frontline, in particular the courage of PC Keith Palmer. We carry on our work and we are all here today because we remember the great sacrifices that have been made to enable us to do so.

Clean air is a right and not a privilege. We launched a joint inquiry in October last year to examine the Government’s latest air quality strategy and whether it was adequate. I thank my fellow Select Committee Chairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) from the Health and Social Care Committee, the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) from the Transport Committee and the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) from the Environmental Audit Committee. I think we worked remarkably well together. I also thank the Committee staff for all their hard work in bringing it all together.

For too long, the United Kingdom has failed to meet legal air quality limits. That is simply not good enough. It was clear to us that Departments must work together to address this national health emergency. My fellow Chairs and I launched the joint inquiry to show that if we can work together, so can Government. We took evidence from expert witnesses, the Mayor of London, Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Transport, the Treasury and the Department for Communities and Local Government. It was clear to us that the Departments are not doing enough to protect the public from toxic air.

Poor air quality costs the UK some £20 billion a year, and it is a huge public health risk to all our constituents. Because of the failure to collaborate and to come up with an effective strategy, the Government are letting us down. Car manufacturers have contributed towards poor air quality for too long, and the Government have allowed that to happen and let them—in my opinion—off the hook. From the USA to Germany, car manufacturers have contributed millions of pounds to cleaning up their air. Why have we not had that contribution in this country?

Councils struggling with air quality need more leadership from Government to ensure that they have the resources to tackle the problem effectively. The Government must work more closely with councils to roll out vital infrastructure, especially electric vehicle charging points and fast-charging points. That would also help small and medium-sized enterprises and others if they wanted to convert to electric and hybrid vehicles, so that they had the charging points as well as the drivers.

All that must be included in a new clean air Act, which would concentrate the resources we so desperately need to clean up our air quality. A refusal to act is simply passing the buck. Our children and grandchildren deserve better. The Government should implement our recommendations and give us all the right to breathe cleaner air. I look forward to the Ministers’ responses to our report.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I echo the hon. Gentleman’s sentiments about this being a very solemn day for this place, when we remember the five victims who so tragically and suddenly lost their lives. In particular, we hold in our hearts PC Keith Palmer, who stood his ground, not 50 yards from this room, to defend this place and to defend our Parliament. The debt of gratitude that we owe him and his family can never be repaid.

One of the interesting things that came out of the inquiry was the huge and developing evidence about the impact of air pollution on health and health inequalities. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a worrying piece of evidence that came out of the inquiry was research from the Royal College of Physicians showing that air pollution could reduce children’s birth weight and damage IQ, and that it was possibly an increasing factor in lung cancer for people who have never smoked?

I agree passionately that we need a new clean air Act. The Environmental Audit Committee has been looking at the accountability mechanisms. We need an environmental protection Act to set up an accountable body so that that mechanism is still in place if and when we leave the EU. The clock is ticking loudly on that. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government need to speed up their activity in that area?

[Mary Creagh]

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need to adopt the World Health Organisation's targets for all air pollutants, not just nitrogen dioxide, and to set out clear milestones for meeting them? It is all very well saying that it will happen in 10 or 15 years' time, but if we do not have milestones, they will not be met.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government need to do much more on central Government procurement? They have said that 25% of Departments' car fleets will be ultra low emission vehicles by 2022. We have just completed an audit of the Ministry of Justice. Of 1,500 vehicles, just two are ultra low emission. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has only two electric vehicles in its fleet. The Government need go much further and much faster, and to extend that target to outside agencies, including the NHS, because its carbon footprint is huge.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the cheapest and simplest method is to label vehicle emissions on new cars so that when a person goes into a car showroom, they know exactly what they are purchasing? That would mean that they could future-proof themselves against any action that might be taken by their local authority or by the Government, so they were not buying something that may lose its value in two or five years' time.

Neil Parish: I thank the hon. Lady for her questions and, again, for her co-operation in putting the Joint Committee together. She will not be surprised to know that I very much agree with her points.

On the clean air Act, that is something we need the Government to come forward with, because it would concentrate not only resource but political drive on cleaning up our air. On the World Health Organisation's targets, we need to be more ambitious than the Government are at the moment. On an environmental protection agency, we need to know more from the Government about how that would come about, how it would take on the role that the European Commission has had, and who could take the Government to court to hold them to account.

The car fleet is an interesting one. I expect that the hon. Lady, like me, has often come through Speaker's Court and seen interesting vehicles waiting for Secretaries of State. The vehicles are all quite large, and as far as I can see very few have anything hybrid about them, so perhaps the Government could lead by example. It will be interesting to see what they do. This is a serious point, because as we get our new fleet of vehicles across all Departments, we need a series of electric vehicles and hybrids. For some places, all-electric will work. If people have to go longer distances, hybrids are essential. We look forward to working with all the other Select Committees to ensure that we deliver cleaner air.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I, too, pay tribute—I am sure I do so on behalf of the whole House—to PC Keith Palmer and the other victims of the terrorist attack a year ago today. I thank all the security staff who are on duty today, enabling our democracy to carry on functioning.

Does my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) agree that the list of illnesses caused by poor air quality is shockingly worrying? It

includes, but is not limited to, respiratory illness, heart attack, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, dementia, type 2 diabetes and obesity. It is quite a long list, and the public probably would not suspect that all those illnesses link back to poor air quality.

Does my hon. Friend also agree that car users, who are sometimes seen as the source of the problem, are actually very serious victims? One of the surprising things that we learnt from doing our report was that people who regularly travel in cars in cities are themselves among those worst affected by poor air quality. Parents driving children to school in cities need to understand what the health effects are on them and their children.

Does my hon. Friend share my concern at what is frankly the absence from the pitch of the healthcare sector in a lot of the debate? We need to see a lot more action from Public Health England and from GPs, informing the public about the risks and telling them what to do. If I go into my local surgery, I will see advice on how to reduce smoking, on how to drink less alcohol and on weight reduction, but despite looking very hard I will not find anything to tell me what I can do to avoid poor air quality and how to deal with that issue.

Does my hon. Friend agree that if the health sector and those responsible for public health put that information out in a way that is helpful and useful to the public, that will help to bring about an army of concerned citizens who will demand change, at both local and national level, to deal with the problem?

Neil Parish: I thank my hon. Friend for so ably representing the Health and Social Care Committee in our Joint Committee. He raises interesting points about the number of illnesses attributed to poor air quality. Of course, we were suddenly told to drive diesel vehicles because we needed to reduce carbon, ignoring the nitric oxide and the particulates. That is now hugely affecting our health. He talked about what is happening outside our schools and inside our cars—we are being affected by particulates even as we drive along.

My hon. Friend made a particular point about schools, and I think that this issue applies not just in the inner cities but everywhere. I say to parents, "When you come to pick up your children, please don't leave your cars ticking over outside, with all the levels of pollution that causes." That is really important across the whole country, not just in the hotspots of very poor air quality.

On the point about Public Health England, we do need much better and much more information about how poor air quality affects our health. That would also raise public awareness of what we are doing as we drive, how we drive and what we drive. It would bring those issues home to people as they make their choices in future.

During the inquiry, my hon. Friend was keen to ensure that our air quality monitoring systems, both in local government and the national systems, work together so that we can collate the figures, to ensure that we get better air quality, and really drill down to find the worst affected areas. Overall, we can all do more to reduce the amount of pollution we create. I thank him for his question.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I will try to keep my remarks short, to enable other hon. Members to ask questions. I associate myself with the

comments paying tribute to and remembering PC Keith Palmer and those other members of the public who were killed or injured one year ago today.

The Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee was absolutely right to highlight the need for joined-up action, across Departments and in a shared responsibility with local authorities, as we set about tackling pollution. It is absolutely essential that the Government show leadership and ensure that all their policies, including taxation and spending policies, are working in concert, not at cross-purposes.

Moreover, does the hon. Gentleman agree that if action to accelerate the take-up of less polluting vehicles, whether cars, vans, trucks or buses, is accompanied by measures that change behaviour and enable and encourage more people to walk, cycle and use public transport, there is a real opportunity not only to tackle air quality, but to meet the Government's other objectives, including cutting carbon emissions, reducing urban congestion and raising physical activity levels?

Neil Parish: I thank the hon. Lady for a great question and for her co-operation and work through the Joint Committee. She is absolutely right about reinforcing the fact that the issue is cross-departmental, because DEFRA is in the dock every time there is a court case, yet much of the solution is in transport and local government as we go about our daily lives. I went to Waterloo the other day to see the electric buses there. If we can get more electric buses across the whole country, that will really help.

With regard to the types of vehicle that we will use and their availability—the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) also raised this—we have to be absolutely certain that we know what vehicles we are buying and that they are properly labelled. Hydrogen vehicles might also be a solution in some places. We have to look at all these things and improve public transport across the piece. We also need to consider the way we run our lives. When we go shopping, for example, ideally we should go to the shops on the bus or on our bicycle, or sometimes shop online, and then all of it would be delivered by vans that were either hybrid or electric, not diesel. There are lots of things we can do not only across Government, but in the way we run our lives. I thank the Chair of the Transport Committee for her contributions.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): Thank you, Mr Stringer, for allowing me to raise one point. This is a very strong report. In particular, it calls for a new clean air Act. I ask the Government to acknowledge that the report, with its strong recommendations, is based on a consensus between four Select Committees. I hope that they will take heed. Will my hon. Friend, who has made a brilliant introduction, join me in celebrating the appearance this very morning of a 100% electric, fully British-made black cab right here in New Palace Yard, of the sort that we will see flooding our streets in the years to come?

Neil Parish: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He reinforces the need for all of us to work together across Departments. The black cab out there that is 100% electric and 100% British is a very good thing. As I said, we can all welcome that, whichever side of the Chamber we sit on, because we need more of these taxis and we need more of them to be made here.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Order. We are running out of time; there are two minutes left, if I am to stick strictly to the 20-minute limit. I ask hon. Members to be brief.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I will be brief, Mr Stringer. May I add electric bicycles to the list of electric vehicles? They offer a huge opportunity to make a quick transformation.

Neil Parish: Yes, electric bicycles are an excellent idea. We will add them to our list.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I associate myself with the earlier remarks. May I ask the Chair of the Select Committee why he has not yet looked at the impact of the waste industry on air quality? It is an important industry and needs to be factored in.

Neil Parish: We did not look at it directly in the joint report, but we have looked at it in previous Select Committee inquiries. I assure the shadow Minister that we will look at it in future, because it is all part of reducing our emissions.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): My concern, as a representative of a midlands constituency bounded by motorways, is motorway pollution. It is certainly a problem for people living in Hinckley.

Neil Parish: Again, motorway pollution is very much down to the vehicles that we drive. As we get cleaner petrol and hybrid cars, and even cleaner diesel cars—although we need to move away from those—that will help to reduce our overall pollution. It is absolutely essential that vehicles on motorways become cleaner.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there was an extremely high level of cross-party consensus on the report, and that we actually deliberated very carefully? It was extraordinary how few party political differences there were over its recommendations.

Neil Parish: The hon. Gentleman is a very good member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. Yes, it is right that we have worked together, and it is right that all political parties now work together to produce cleaner air, because that is a right and not a privilege. Having two Chairs from either side of the political divide also helped; I think we all worked very well together. I again thank everybody for that.

Backbench Business

Leaving the EU: NHS

1.52 pm

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect on the NHS of the UK leaving the EU.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for supporting the debate and the thousands of our constituents all over the country who pressed for it.

The debate is very timely. We are hopefully on the brink of a formal agreement on a transition deal, which will, over the next few months, very much set the scene for the vital negotiations on our long-term future relationship with the rest of the EU. It is also extremely timely given yesterday's publication of the Health and Social Care Committee's second report on the impact of Brexit on our health and social care system. I thank my colleagues on the Committee for the work they put in and all the individuals and organisations that provided us with invaluable evidence.

As you will remember, Mr Stringer, the NHS featured prominently in the EU referendum campaign. We well remember the famous—or infamous—bus that was taken around the country promising £350 million extra for the NHS if we left the EU. Most commentators, and several leave campaigners themselves, have credited that since discredited claim with taking the leave campaign over the line. Our health and social care systems also face one of the most significant impacts from Brexit, so it is absolutely right and imperative that Parliament has the time to focus on and debate the subject before final decisions are taken.

The headlines from our Committee report from yesterday are that, if Brexit goes wrong and there is no deal, or if we have too hard a Brexit, the results will be extremely damaging for patients; our health and social care services; Britain's important and successful pharmaceutical industry; the supply and costs of medicines and vital medical equipment; our world-renowned scientific research base; the status of EU staff, who help to keep our health and social care services running; and UK nationals living or working on the continent, including British retirees, who depend on reciprocal arrangements to access healthcare.

It is fair to say that the majority of our Committee would rather we were not leaving the EU at all, or that, if we do, we stay in the single market and customs union. That was the near unanimous preference of all our witnesses, whether patients groups; charities; doctors, nurses and their representatives; the drugs companies, which do such vital work to develop and make available life-saving therapies and contribute so much to our economy; the manufacturers of vital medical equipment such as radioisotopes, which are used in the treatment of cancer; and our world-renowned medical research centres.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for bringing this debate to the Chamber today. As many Members will know, my predecessor Baroness Tessa Jowell is campaigning, in the face of the cancer that she is dealing with, for

greater international research and access to dynamic trials and new treatments for patients suffering from brain tumours. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Brexit puts at risk exactly that kind of international collaboration—that access to data sharing and to international scientific research—that patients suffering from brain tumours and many other conditions need to see move forward, not backwards? This is a grave threat from Brexit.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Before I call Ben Bradshaw, let me say that we have sufficient time, given the number of people who want to speak, but may I please ask that interventions are to the point and brief?

Mr Bradshaw: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). I will develop that argument in more detail in a moment.

Our Committee also recognised that the Government have ruled out, so far, continued membership of the customs union and the single market. In the absence of a change of mind from the Government, the Committee concluded that the least damaging Brexit for our NHS will be for us to keep the closest possible regulatory alignment with the rest of the EU in the long term. A majority of the Committee would probably have liked our recommendations to be stronger on that and to include keeping open the option of an European economic area-type relationship in the long term. However, as Committee members we recognised that it is much more powerful for a Select Committee to agree a unanimous report, which ours is, rather than to disagree on a contested one.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Is the right hon. Gentleman able to say whether his Committee found anything that was positive about Brexit from a health perspective?

Mr Bradshaw: Not that I recall. Maybe when the Chair of the Committee, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), contributes she will have better recall than me. The unanimity of the evidence we heard was very striking indeed.

As well as pursuing the closest possible regulatory alignment, one of our strongest recommendations to the Government is that they must be much more open and clearer about their Brexit contingency planning for a no-deal scenario.

We note and welcome the Prime Minister's most recent statement that the UK will seek associate membership of the European Medicines Agency—although, given that, it is tragic that we are losing the EMA headquarters from London to the Netherlands. We also welcome the recognition shown by both the Health Secretary and his Lords Minister in their evidence of the importance of continued regulatory alignment with the rest of the EU. We noted that that was in contrast to the Foreign Secretary's statement that medicines regulation is one of the areas where he would like to see the UK diverge from the EU. I am pleased that the Health Secretary at least won that argument.

However, we have serious concerns about the Government's lack of a strategy for a no-deal scenario. The Government are still saying that they want a pick-and-mix, cake-and-eat-it relationship with the EU in the future. The image the Prime Minister used in her

speech was of three baskets: full alignment in some areas, full divergence in others and something in between for the rest. But if the other 27 EU countries have made anything clear throughout this process, it is that that option is not available. We can have a Norway-style relationship, or we can have a Canada-style relationship, but we cannot have Canada-plus-plus-plus or Norway-minus-minus-minus. It is our choice.

I wish the Government well in their endeavours to achieve their pick-and-mix deal, but given the strong likelihood, if not certainty, that we will not get that, either Ministers will need to do the sensible thing and concede on the customs union and single market, or we will face the danger of crashing out on World Trade Organisation terms. Let me just spell out what our witnesses told us that would mean.

First, it would mean the seizing up of our medicines and medical equipment supply chains. We export 45 million patient packets of medicines a month to other EU countries and import 37 million. Any customs, regulatory or other barriers to this trade will affect supplies. Radioisotopes, for example, are vital in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. They have a very short lifespan. Their smooth importation from the continent is time critical. The British Medical Association has warned that any disruption to this trade could lead to the cancellation of patient appointments, operations and vital radiotherapy treatment for cancer. Medicines and medical equipment would also become more expensive and there would be delays in getting them licensed and available for British patients. Switzerland gets access to new drugs 157 days later than the EU; Canada, six to 12 months later.

Secondly, we would suffer a further haemorrhaging of NHS staff who are EU nationals, exacerbating the staffing crisis that the NHS and social care face.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend has made a powerful case about the risks of crashing out with no deal. Does he agree that uncertainty is a crucial factor in the NHS's problems? Individuals want to plan their own lives, and the NHS wants to plan its staff. Many staff have said to me that they are concerned about the settled status process—when it will go live, what it will involve and whether it will be able to process applications quickly—and are making decisions on that basis.

Mr Bradshaw: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The uncertainty not only bedevils business decisions, but is having a huge effect on the NHS, the pharmaceutical industry and the staff in all these sectors.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I represent the most remote constituency on the UK mainland. The recruitment and retention of qualified staff is a huge issue in my constituency. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that a crash out, and the problems he outlines, will be even more emphasised in the north of Scotland?

Mr Bradshaw: Coming from a peripheral region, I completely understand the challenges that the hon. Gentleman and his constituents face and the difficulty that our health and social care systems already have in recruiting and retaining staff.

I will give the example of midwives. EU midwives provide care for 40,000 mothers in England every year. The Royal College of Midwives has reported that the number of EU midwives registering to practise in the UK has fallen “off a cliff” since the referendum, and that at the current rate of loss there will be “no EU midwives left in the UK within a decade.”

We must have a clear assurance from the Government that, whatever the deal or no deal, the vital flow of EU medical and other staff to this country will not be affected. EU nationals already here also need an absolute assurance that their current status and that of their families will not change.

Thirdly, we would suffer the relocation of significant parts of our pharmaceutical industry—one of Britain's most important and successful sectors—to the continent. Indeed, as part of our inquiry we were told by GlaxoSmithKline and other companies that they have already spent tens of millions of pounds moving research and medicines licensing work to other EU countries as part of their contingency planning for a hard Brexit. That money would otherwise be spent on medical research in this country. It is investment that they told us will not come back.

Fourthly, UK citizens visiting or living in the rest of the EU, including a large number of British pensioners, could lose their eligibility for reciprocal free health care. If they could not afford to pay, they would be forced to fall back on our health and social care system. The average cost to the UK of a British citizen being treated in the rest of the EU is £2,300. The cost of treating a pensioner in Britain is almost double that at £4,500.

Our report highlights a lot of other areas where there will be a serious impact if we get Brexit wrong: the potential loss of European Reference Networks, access to and participation in clinical trials, research funding, the mutual recognition of qualifications and data sharing. The loss or diminution of any or all those areas would damage Britain's leading role as a medical research centre and the cross-fertilisation of knowledge and expertise that is so important for medical advances and patient safety.

I know that many other hon. Members want to speak, so I will bring my contribution to a close. Before I do, it is important to note that there are areas that the Health Committee's latest report does not cover: concern that future trade deals with countries such as America could open up the NHS to wholesale privatisation; the possible impact of diverging from EU standards on the environment and food safety on public health, which the Committee plans to return to later this year; and, most significantly, the economic and fiscal impact of Brexit and the knock-on effect on health and social care funding as whole.

We know from the Government's leaked impact studies that all Brexit options will hit Britain's GDP over the next 15 years by between 2% and 8%—that is, 2% if we stay in the single market and customs union, 5% for the Government's preferred option, and 8% in the case of a no-deal scenario. Unless the Government propose to significantly increase taxes or borrowing, or to cut other public services to move money to the NHS and social care, that can mean only that there will be less money available for health and social care, and not the extra that was promised on the side of that bus.

[Mr Bradshaw]

All in all, the next few months of Brexit negotiations will be absolutely critical for the future of our NHS for years to come. Our constituents expect us to hold the Government closely to account, and we will.

2.5 pm

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. It is also a pleasure to see the Chair of the Health Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). When my right honourable Friend, then the Member for Charnwood, Stephen Dorrell, stood down, I had the pleasure to chair that Committee, which I served on during the 2015 Parliament, and it was a great disappointment when I stood against my hon. Friend and she won. I will not tell hon. Members about how close the contest was, other than that she won handsomely and has chaired the Committee very well.

This is a sombre day: the anniversary of the death of members of the public and of PC Keith Palmer not very far from here. On that day I was too close for comfort; I will not forget it. I reflected then, and I reflect now, that luck plays a part in life. We are all lucky to be here today.

I want to focus on a section of this important report and on the Government's response. I see the Minister in his place. He took over from my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), who was my Whip for a while. I want to focus on the future staffing requirements and on delays and cost.

The report states:

"The Government's plan for our post-Brexit should...ensure that health and social care providers can retain and recruit the brightest and best from all part of the globe".

On healthcare, we have to think beyond the European Union when we address Brexit, and I congratulate the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) on securing the debate and on his introductory speech.

The Committee reported:

"The Government must acknowledge the need for the system for recruiting staff to the NHS, social care and research post-Brexit to be streamlined to reduce both delays and cost."

The Government's response states:

"We are also boosting the domestic supply of staff through expanding training places and nursing and other areas."

We have to focus on other areas. The thrust of my remarks is that if we are going to solve the ever-increasing problems of demand in the health service generally and have a better service post-Brexit, we have to broaden the base of practitioners; we have to look beyond doctors and nurses.

As part of that, we have to pay attention to regulation. The Committee addressed that under recommendation 10, which states:

"Attention needs to be paid to the balance between patient safety as served by regulatory rules which may restrict access to the profession... Regulation should not evolve into unnecessary bureaucratic barriers that inhibit the flow of skilled clinicians into the NHS."

What we need to do post-Brexit is get more skilled people—health practitioners other than doctors and nurses—who adhere to properly regulated registers, into

the health service, to reduce the demand on the doctors, nurses and other hard-pressed professionals who work there.

I refer my hon. Friend the Minister to the recent report by the Professional Standards Authority and the Royal Society for Public Health. The PSA regulates 31 occupations, including acupuncturists, holistic therapists, hypnotherapists and clinical technologists, as well as the Society of Homeopaths, the UK Council for Psychotherapy and many others. One of its key recommendations was that its 80,000 regulated practitioners should have the authority to make direct NHS referrals in appropriate cases, thereby reducing the administrative burden on GP surgeries.

I have tabled questions about whether Ministers have considered the report, and to date I have not had a positive response. I am sure that that is an oversight. However, I want to point out to my hon. Friend, and perhaps to the Chair of the Health Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes, that Harry Cayton, who chairs the PSA, is not happy that the report has effectively been ignored. For years we have been told that better regulation is necessary before additional practitioners can be given the opportunity to practise in the health service. As soon as better regulation appears, that seems to be of no consequence. The report was produced by not just the PSA but the RSPH. Where else do we go? The work has been done, and I should like to hear from the Minister about the important work on regulation done by the PSA.

I want to refer to two parliamentary reports. In 2000 the House of Lords produced a report on complementary and alternative medicine and set out to categorise a wide diaspora of services that were available in that field. It came up with a classification, and it is important that I run through it. In the top rank were five categories of what were known then as complementary and alternative medical practitioners. The report said they had to be considered independently in relation to the question whether they should be included in mainstream healthcare. The five were osteopaths, chiropractors, acupuncturists, herbal medicine practitioners and homeopaths. I shall run briefly through those in relation to their appropriateness for use in the health service.

I had the honour to serve in the 1987 Parliament, and at that time the mantra was, "The osteopaths are out of control." It was all about one or two miscreants and why they needed regulation. Some of us organised a private Member's Bill, and I served on the Committee that resulted, in the 1992 Parliament, when John Major was Prime Minister, in the Act of Parliament that regulates osteopathy—the Osteopaths Act 1993. Osteopaths are now regulated by Act of Parliament. Not only that, but they have brought the different colleges of osteopathy together so that they are regulated by one body.

Secondly, there are the chiropractors, who are also back manipulators. We got another private Member's Bill through the House. That became the Chiropractic Act 1994. The chiropractors came together—the McTimoney chiropractors and the others—and were bound together under one regulatory body. They are regulated by Act of Parliament.

Before I go on to the third discipline, my hon. Friend the Minister should be aware that the number of people taking hours off work for lower back pain is the highest for all complaints. He would do well to make better use

of chiropractors and osteopaths in the new landscape post-Brexit. That is something we have ignored, and now we are freed from the European connection, or will be—although we will obviously have links—we should look at it.

The third discipline that the noble Lords referred to was acupuncture, which is regulated by the PSA, and the fourth is herbal medicines, which has different forms of self-regulation. In the 2010 to 2015 Parliament, I was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), then Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Health, to work with Professor David Walker on a report on herbal medicine. We met as a Select Committee meets, for the best part of a year, to produce a report that recommended further improvement in regulation. That is something we need to return to.

The last discipline referred to was homeopathic medicine. Homeopathy is the most controversial of all the treatments I have described, but has had huge support in the House. In the 2006-07 Session, Rudi Vis, a former Labour MP, whose constituency I forget, put down an early-day motion in support of six NHS homeopathic hospitals. That was remarkable for two reasons. First, it attracted over 200 signatures, or one third of the House. Secondly, it was signed by the Secretary of State—not the former Secretary of State, but my hon. Friend the Minister's boss. He signed it—here is his name on the motion. He is sympathetic to homeopathy. His problem is that he has been sandbagged by people such as the chief medical officer, who knows nothing about it. That is a major problem.

The early-day motion said:

“That this House welcomes the positive contribution made to the health of the nation by the NHS homeopathic hospitals; notes that some six million people use complementary treatments each year; believes that complementary medicine has the potential to offer clinically-effective and cost-effective solutions to common health problems faced by NHS patients”.

In subsequent Parliaments, other motions were tabled, and there was a change in approach—not by members of the public, but by a tiny, vociferous anti group outside the House, which launched attacks on Members who signed the motion. I took that to the Speaker as a breach of privilege. There was a motion backing homeopathy in—

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Order. I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman; he has referred his remarks back to the impact on the NHS of leaving the EU, but I think he is drifting a little. Does he think he could bring those remarks back to the subject before us?

David Tredinnick: I certainly can, Mr Stringer. I would be glad to. We served together on the Science and Technology Committee in the 2010 to 2015 Parliament, and you know my interest in this.

I will draw this all together with what is now a very important report. I have referred to the Lords report and said that there has been some doubt about complementary medicine. The reason the Government need to look at this post Brexit is the publication last week in *The BMJ* of a report entitled “Do NHS GP surgeries employing GPs additionally trained in integrative or complementary medicine have lower antibiotic

prescribing rates?” More than 7,000 practices were surveyed—I will end on this point, Mr Stringer—and the report shows that there are statistically significant differences between the patient populations of surgeries employing integrated medicine and those of conventional GP surgeries. It is a properly formed report, and I suggest to the Minister that such treatments can reduce the cost and prescribing not only of antibiotics—we know that Dame Sally Davies published a book called “The Drugs Don't Work”—but of other drugs.

In the post-Brexit landscape, the Minister has to look at a wider field. To ensure I stay in order, Mr Stringer, I turn to a question I asked the Secretary of State this week:

“Does my right hon. Friend agree that leaving the EU will be a good opportunity to build links with other countries' medical systems, particularly those of the Chinese, who have, for instance, integrated Chinese medicine and western medicine to reduce the demand for antibiotics?”

The Secretary of State replied:

“My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to antimicrobial resistance because China is one of the big countries that can make a difference on that, and yes, we have had lots of discussion with Chinese Health Ministers about how we can work together on that.”—[*Official Report*, 20 March 2018; Vol. 368, c. 149.]

As a representative of Leicestershire, I found that significant, because Leicester's hospitals have signed a memorandum of understanding with China—with a Nantong University-affiliated hospital—which expands a deal they already have to ensure greater research and training collaboration across the international medical community.

I have used Chinese medicine for years. I have no doubt that, post Brexit, when we have a better opportunity to strike deals and are no longer being hampered by the European Union's restriction, we can bring those practices here. It would be good to set up a trial. Also, the Minister should look at the Indian Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy—AYUSH—which I will be visiting in September, to see how that wider base reduces healthcare costs in India.

When I was Chair of the Health Committee for a short time, I managed to get out a report on long-term care and conditions. About 15 million people in the UK have long-term conditions, which involve polypharmacy, or lots of drugs, and polymorbidity, or lots of problems. Many complementary therapies are effective in that context. That is another reason the Minister should look at them.

On Monday, the Secretary of State announced five new medical schools. Is the Minister aware of the time medical schools spend teaching the disciplines I have been discussing? In a five-year course, it is one hour. No wonder many doctors are reticent about such referrals, given that they do not understand the subject. Let us have a wider base of learning in the new medical schools so we have a better service in the future.

I have spent a long time in this House—30 years—and I have pretty much stuck to this subject right the way through. I think we are at a turning point with the report I have referred to, published in *The BMJ*, in which 7,000 practices are analysed. It blows out of the water the argument that there is no evidence. There jolly well is evidence, and if the Minister will only look at it, he can improve the quality of the post-Brexit health service, get better value for money, and bring people

[David Tredinnick]

who have studied for years and who are out in the cold into the service. If he does that, we will have a much better situation than we have now.

2.24 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Thank you for calling me relatively early in the debate, Mr Stringer. I apologise to hon. Members, particularly those on the Front Bench, because I will not be here for the closing speeches, but I will of course read them assiduously. I and some other MPs have read a meeting with Imperial Healthcare Trust that has taken a long time to arrange. Given the pressures and crisis of funding in many parts of the NHS, I think I need to be there. It is not entirely irrelevant to the subject of the debate. I will, for the reasons I have given, try to be brief and confine my comments to the issues that affect my constituents.

I am extraordinarily privileged to have some of the finest healthcare and medical research facilities not only in this country, but across Europe and the world, in Hammersmith and Shepherd's Bush. I have three of the five hospitals in Imperial Healthcare Trust: Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea, Hammersmith, and Charing Cross. I also have, being built as we speak on a 23-acre site in White City, the major new campus for Imperial College. They are amazing institutions that this country is proud to have, and they are truly international in the staff who work there, their research and co-operation, and the funding that they receive. We cannot avoid the fact that they are grievously affected by the consequences of Brexit. They are resilient organisations and they will do what they can to mitigate the effects.

Just a few weeks ago, Imperial College announced a joint venture with the National Centre for Scientific Research, one of the major French scientific research institutions. There is already a lot of international co-operation, but one of the main purposes of the joint venture is to allow continued access to vital European funding. We welcome attempts to mitigate the effects of Brexit, but when we talk about Brexit it always seems to be about how we can achieve a second-best position. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), who eloquently expressed the variety of damage that Brexit will do to the healthcare sector, I find it difficult to see any positives. Yes, it is possible to see mitigation, but very difficult to see how we are going to be any better off in any capacity as a result of Brexit.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the research facilities he has described in the hospitals in his constituency, we are talking about not only the effect on the institutions, but the ability of the entire health sector to produce the best outcomes for patients in this country, because they get new treatments faster because of the co-operative work being done internationally?

Andy Slaughter: Yes, the system is fully integrated across EU countries, and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Last November, the president of Imperial College, Alice Gast, revealed that some of the 2,000 staff at Imperial College who are EU nationals have already left. I will come on to why that should be the case, given

what the Government have said on EU nationals. Half of them—1,000 people—have taken legal advice on their positions post Brexit. A quarter of the staff and a fifth of the students at Imperial are from the EU. In the healthcare sector across London there are 20,000 staff from the EU, which is about 15%.

A good example is another of my local hospitals, the Royal Brompton, where 30% of the clinical staff are EU nationals. I have visited the Royal Brompton, and it has the most extraordinary paediatric cardiac surgery unit doing the most advanced and delicate operations on newly born babies. When I visited, all the surgeons who were operating were EU nationals, I think from five different countries. The Government may say, "Well, so what?", but I do not imagine that they maintain, as has been said previously, that we can give a sudden opportunity to replace many doctors and nurses with home-grown doctors and nurses. That is not going to happen overnight. We know that the demand is such that we will continue to rely on clinicians from abroad for the indefinite future.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an incredibly valid point about staffing in our hospitals. My local hospital, St George's, has already experienced a loss of staff because people from the EU are leaving. Our patients have to wait longer to be seen. For example, one lady who had to see a radiographer was seen within a day, but now she has to wait up to six weeks to be seen. Does he agree that what the Government say does not ring true in reality?

Andy Slaughter: I agree with my hon. Friend. If Members are honest, that is the experience that many of us will have had. There are many questions about the health service, as I have indicated, and the situation is simply being exacerbated by removing one of the most compatible, professional and necessary parts of the health service: its staff from the EU27 countries.

Why are we losing those staff? We hear protestations from the Government that those who are here now and until 29 March next year are welcome to stay, but that is not correct. First, there is uncertainty, because nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Secondly, the rights of EU staff will not be the same as they are now, as my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) indicated in her intervention. There is no continuity of rights; settled status has to be applied for, there has to be a register and there might be identity cards. As often happens, certainly with people in medical research grades, they might leave the country for five years but want to come back, yet they would then no longer have settled status. The position in the transitional phase, we understand, will be different again.

Even if some legal certainty is eventually given, there is still the climate or mood among EU citizens. I can speak confidently about this, because more than 20% of my residents in Hammersmith are EU citizens—it is one of the top three boroughs in the country for the percentage of EU residents—so I talk to them every week. I have now talked to and corresponded with not hundreds but thousands of them over the past two years, and they are extremely concerned. Let us be honest: they have transferrable skills and they can go to work in countries where they feel more welcome and valued than they do here.

The Government have not done enough—indeed, the Government cannot do enough—to reassure those EU citizens. The message that Brexit sends is that they are at least not as welcome as they once were. I will end on this, which I came across when preparing for the debate. It is something that Imperial College Healthcare Trust put out shortly after the referendum, when it introduced #LoveOurEUStaff. The management wrote to the staff:

“Our country is currently in a place of uncertainty. There has been no clear message from the Government about what the future holds for EU citizens living in the UK... I’ve heard that many EU and other overseas citizens are feeling concerned about their futures in the UK. I’ve also seen the media reports of an increase in racist incidents following the referendum vote.”

Eighteen months on, I wish I could say that those comments no longer applied. Sadly, they do. The fact that we are barely nearer certainty in the matter means that every day individuals are voting with their feet, feeling that they will be more welcome and their skills more valued in other countries. Frankly, the Government are not doing very much to address that point. I, too, read the debate and hear what the Minister says about that. I wonder what the Government can do, given the hole that they have dug themselves into.

2.34 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure and privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for enabling this important debate, and the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), my friend and colleague from the Health and Social Care Committee, for his detailed and valuable contribution. He outlined the grave concerns that most of the Committee have heard and feel themselves on some of the issues relating to Brexit and the NHS. It is important to our Committee that the Minister is listening, that the report is taken seriously and that our recommendations are taken forward.

This is a solemn day. I echo the sentiments of other Members who have spoken. It is a year since we lost PC Keith Palmer, who sacrificed his life in preserving our democracy here at Westminster. My thoughts are very much with his family and with everyone who has been affected by that horrific attack on Westminster and our democracy. It is important that we also remember Jo Cox and her extremely poignant words: we do have much more in common than sets us apart. I wish to take those sentiments forward. No matter what happens, if we work together and take things forward constructively, there is always a positive way ahead to defeat extremism and terrorism.

I come to the topic of the debate. My constituents are finding it difficult to have continued interest in the Brexit debate, given how lengthy it has already been, but when it comes to the NHS that is entirely different. The NHS is fundamental to our values. I have never met anyone who has tried to say that it is not such a valuable institution or the bedrock of our society, or who does not greatly admire and understand the dedication of the NHS staff who serve us all so well. We all—our friends, family and ourselves—rely on the NHS at the most vulnerable points in our lives. The NHS is therefore different for most of our constituents across the United Kingdom. It must be treated with priority and preserved, and all steps must be taken to ensure that any impact of

Brexit on our NHS is fully mitigated. We rely on the NHS, and we will continue to do so. The first point I make to the Minister is to emphasise the importance of our NHS.

My second point is on the workforce, which has already been touched on by many Members. I have been sent a report by the British Medical Association. I refer the House to my background as a psychologist, having previously worked in the NHS. There are real concerns about the workforce and Brexit. The BMA highlights in its report its concerns that highly skilled doctors and professionals will choose to leave the UK because of the ongoing uncertainty in the negotiations. Like other hon. Members, I think it is important that the Department reassure those staff about how valuable they are and about how much their contribution is wanted and needed moving forward. It is imperative that we continue to retain their services for our populations.

Quite astoundingly, nearly half of EEA doctors—45% of them—surveyed by the BMA in November 2017 said that they were considering leaving the UK following the referendum vote. Those are critical numbers. I believe that in England 7.7% of the workforce, or 12,029, are EEA graduates. The figure I have been given in Scotland is 5.7%, or 1,339—it is 8.8%, or 550, in Northern Ireland, and 6.4%, or 624, in Wales. These are high numbers of people working right on the frontline to preserve our healthcare and we need to make sure that they can continue to do that.

Some might say that there has been a shortage or a short-termism in our own training of medical staff, and that issue also has to be addressed in the future. However, it takes a very long time to train doctors and nurses. We must therefore consider the much-needed and valued services that we have at this time and at least for the next decade in relation to our staffing model.

The next issue I will talk about is mutual recognition of professional qualifications. The BMA is calling for the maintenance of reciprocal arrangements, such as mutual recognition of professional qualifications, after Brexit, which would enable professionals who qualified in one member state to practise their profession in another. So what are the Minister and his Department doing in relation to that issue? It seems crucial for the next decade or so that we maintain the workforce that we have and that we ensure we can continue to attract highly skilled professionals to come to the UK to work.

Reciprocal healthcare and the European health insurance card, or EHIC, have already been mentioned. It seems very important, particularly for people who have the most chronic illnesses and who are moving from the UK to the EU, or who are on holiday, and for those coming here from the EU, that we have some form of arrangement in that regard for the future. I must say that I have had some difficulties with the EHIC in the past, with my own family, in being able to utilise it appropriately in some countries. However, it is not until something is lost entirely that its merit and value are realised. I do not think that it has been a perfect system by any means. However, it is certainly something that we want to retain and ensure is still available to us in future, particularly for some of the most vulnerable people, who still wish to be independent and to travel but who may find it extremely difficult to afford insurance, and therefore might otherwise put themselves at risk.

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

The Committee heard a lot of evidence about life sciences when producing this report. I have been astounded by the evidence we have been given about just how world-leading our life sciences are. I have to say that that is not something I was acutely aware of, even given all my years in the NHS, but we have world-leading life sciences. We have some of the top researchers and we have been involved in, and leading, some of the most crucial clinical trials. We must ensure that we hold that position in future. That is a real issue, because there is a concern that if those who are very much at the top of their game in research are unable to continue to lead on clinical trials from the UK, they might seek to leave. We cannot allow that to happen, because it would plunge our world-leading life sciences sector into the depths.

I would really appreciate it if the Minister spoke about how we will maintain our life sciences at their current level and how we will ensure that our fantastic university hospitals—I have one in my constituency: Hairmyres hospital—continue to support the great research work they do alongside their clinical work, and that they have all the amenities and the top professionals they need in the future.

It was Rare Disease Day just a few weeks ago, and I took part in it. We sang outside Westminster tube station to raise awareness of rare diseases. Rare diseases are of course rare, so many people do not experience them. However, there are many types of rare disease, so it is quite usual that some of us will know at least someone who has experienced or is living with a rare disease. It is crucial that people with rare diseases participate in clinical trials, because we need them in order to make progress on prognosis and find the best treatments. We need to ensure that we maintain that collaboration with the EU, because otherwise patients on the ground will suffer.

Patients with rare diseases might already feel quite isolated; they will have few other people they can speak to who are experiencing the same difficulties or have the same diagnosis. However, they need to be included in clinical trials, which cannot be conducted in the UK alone. Will the Minister comment on how we will ensure that that collaboration continues, particularly on rare diseases?

On medications, the Committee heard evidence about time-sensitive supply chains and the potential risks to them. The need to ensure that sufficient stock is on the UK market could mean the stockpiling of those products, and manufacturers might not supply certain products to the UK until only a few weeks before they are needed, so the supply chain is crucial. This work is time limited. Distributors of medicines in the UK usually keep about 10 days' worth of stock, but many manufacturers can stock medicines for up to four months in wholesale warehouses. How will that work, depending on the negotiated arrangement? We need to get medicines timeously to patients who need them—particularly, as has been mentioned, radioisotopes for those who suffer from cancer and other illnesses.

These issues are crucial. When I speak to constituents, Brexit seems like a hypothetical thing, way in the distance. However, as soon as we start to home in on what it will mean in their day-to-day lives for their health and wellbeing and that of their families, and for our NHS,

Brexit comes to the front of their minds. That is why the Minister has the weight of the world on his shoulders, because he is required to take forward these vital issues for everybody who depends on the NHS and our services. I look forward to his reply. On medical radioisotopes, I led on the cancer strategy in the main Chamber just a month or so ago. It is vital that we get this right for our cancer strategy, to ensure that all the other work that it underpins can move forward in the way it is supposed to.

I will finish by briefly speaking about qualified persons, which is something I did not know much about before the inquiry. I am led to believe, from the evidence that we heard, that they are already a scarce resource. There has to be mutual recognition of the training of qualified persons between the EU and the UK, so that these qualified persons, who we need to ensure the safety of medications, remain in the country and can do that vital work. What progress has the Minister made on work relating to qualified persons?

I do not want to take up any more time, because other Members wish to speak, so I will end where I started. Brexit can seem like a concept that is not linked to our everyday lives. When it comes to the NHS, however, that is entirely different. It is crucial to all patients—it is crucial to all constituents, actually. It therefore falls to the UK Government to ensure that the very best outcome for clinical care is negotiated and achieved.

2.50 pm

Dr Paul Williams (Stockton South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, for the first time, I believe. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) on securing this debate and I thank all other hon. Members who have contributed and will contribute.

I have to declare many interests in this debate. Not only am I a patient of the NHS—not too frequently, I hope—but I also work in the NHS. I began my career as a medical student in 1991 in Newcastle and I spent thousands of days working in NHS hospitals, worked for many years as a GP, seen thousands of babies born in the NHS, helped to manage hundreds of good deaths and worked with thousands of colleagues, who are some of the most committed people one could ever hope to meet. My mum worked in the NHS as a nurse. My dad still works in the NHS, managing a practice. My partner works in the NHS and many of my friends work in the NHS. Tomorrow morning, I will be doing a GP surgery at the beginning of the day before working in my constituency and ending the day with an MP surgery.

My experience has taught me that it is the people who make the NHS, Mr Stringer. It is not just the ones whom politicians always talk about—doctors, nurses, paramedics and midwives. The NHS has amazing people working as laboratory technicians, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, pharmacists, medical secretaries; people working in finance, planning, leadership, estates management, catering and cleaning. Add to that all the people who work in social care, providing care and support to people in their own homes, and in nursing and residential homes, and we have an army of people all dedicated to health and care.

Many of the people in that army do not begin their lives in the UK. We have always welcomed people—particularly, but not exclusively, doctors, nurses and midwives—from other parts of the world. In the last 20 years, the migration into the NHS from other EU countries has been significant, so that EU migrants now make up more than 5% of nurses, one in 10 of all hospital doctors and more than 5% of midwives. There are more than 60,000 EU citizens working in our NHS, giving their lives to helping our NHS. There are another estimated 90,000 EU citizens working in our social care system. Joan Pons Laplana, a Spanish nurse who has worked in the NHS for 17 years and just won the nurse of the year award, says that the uncertainty over Brexit is leading to EU citizens leaving the NHS. Whatever the Government say about EU citizens' rights, their message is not yet getting through and it is not being believed. People are not hearing them.

Some 10,000 EU health workers have left the NHS since the Brexit vote. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter has mentioned, there are enough EU midwives working in the NHS to staff around 12 maternity units. Between them, EU midwives provide care for around 40,000 mothers in England each year. There are 1,388 EU midwives as of September 2017, representing 5.4% of the workforce. But since the Brexit vote, the number of EU midwives coming has reduced and the number leaving has increased. There was a net loss of 183 EU midwives between October 2016 and September 2017. At that rate there would be no EU midwives left in the UK within a decade. This is happening right here, right now. It is a direct consequence of the Brexit vote.

Whichever way we look at it, the situation is bad. Between September 2016 and September 2017, there was a fall of 89% in new EU registrations to the Nursing & Midwifery Council, a drop from 10,000 people registering to just 1,000 in just one year.

It might be said that we should train our own nurses, not rely on nurses from overseas. I say to that yes and no: yes, we should provide more nursing and midwifery training placements, but changes to nursing bursaries have not led to any increases in placements offered by universities. At the moment, one in 10 nursing posts is vacant. What does that lead to? It leads to wards that might be a nurse down, putting pressure on the other staff, and hospitals having to spend billions of pounds on bank staff to fill the gaps. What does it mean for patients? It means having to wait longer for their appointment, no nurse being available when they are in pain and press their buzzer, and midwives being unable to give the one-to-one care that women deserve when they are in labour. When there are thousands of nursing and midwifery vacancies across the UK, we cannot afford to lose any staff.

The Government might say that they will guarantee the rights of EU staff already here, but that is not enough. Brexit is already making it less desirable for EU clinicians to come to the UK to practise. To limit the damage as much as possible, we need to keep the door open to EU staff and, more than that, we need to actively encourage them to keep coming.

This is not just about nurses; it is about doctors, too. The General Medical Council surveyed more than 2,000 European economic area doctors practising in the UK last year. More than half of them are considering

leaving the UK, and 91% of those say that our decision to leave the EU was a factor in their considerations. Those are doctors, nurses, midwives and other important frontline clinical staff from EU countries doing an amazing job for our NHS whom we cannot afford to lose when the NHS is already under immense pressure.

Staff are important, but so is the money to pay them. We have already seen a slump in the value of the pound, making it less attractive for EU nationals to come and work here. That slump has also made it more expensive for the NHS to buy supplies and medicines; the *Health Service Journal* has estimated £900 million of extra costs each year. We have already seen our economic growth fall from the best in the G7 to the lowest. That reduction means less money for our country and less money for our NHS. Let us be honest: the NHS is not getting the money that it needs from the Chancellor of the Exchequer because when he looks at growth forecasts, he sees downward curves. He sees not enough money coming in to meet the growing needs of our ageing population. The lost growth that has already happened as a result of the Brexit vote is the equivalent of £350 million a week. That has already happened, and the future looks worse.

For the north-east of England—the part of the country that I represent—the Government's own analysis of the impact of Brexit on the economy shows a reduction in economic output over the next 15 years. The Government's analysis predicts that if we left the EU but stayed in the single market and customs union, we would grow by 2% less than if we stayed in the EU. It predicts 11% less growth even with a comprehensive trade deal and, if we end up with a no-deal Brexit, 16% less growth. That all means much less money for the NHS, not only now but for the next 15 years.

We have to ask, is it all worth it? This is not the deal that people thought they were getting when they voted to leave the EU. It is not the deal that my constituents in Stockton South, some of whom are here today, wanted, whichever way they voted.

If it were not enough that we have a staffing crisis being made worse by Brexit and a huge hole in our finances, we also need to look at the companies that work so hard to provide drugs and supplies for our NHS. Much of our medical research takes place together with European partners. More than 340,000 patients are enrolled in EU-wide clinical trials, with the UK leading the way in Europe for conducting clinical trials. We have the same set of rules for research as our European partners, and the same set of rules for adoption of new medicines. Together, we form a formidable partnership, representing almost one quarter of the global market for pharmaceuticals; alone, we are only 3%. If we separate from the European Medicines Agency but keep what the Government call “close regulatory alignment”, we will lose our influence and our leadership role in developing these systems and processes. We could end up a rule taker, not a rule maker. If we set our own rules that are different from those of the EU, we risk becoming de-prioritised for new medicines. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter said, on average, Swiss patients get new drugs almost six months later than EU patients. We risk being excluded from clinical trials, for which data is held and co-ordination takes place at an EU level.

[Dr Paul Williams]

The supply chain for medicines and medical devices works now, but there is a risk that it will be disrupted if we leave the customs union. Do not just take my word for it; ask the members of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, made up of small and medium-sized enterprises working in our med-tech sector, which makes products that cross borders. They say they risk being put out of business by rising charges and more complex customs arrangements.

I am not doom-mongering about the future; this is happening now. The European Medicines Agency is already leaving the UK, taking with it 900 staff, about £300 million in taxable turnover each year, and the UK's prestige from hosting such an esteemed organisation. The Committee asked Phil Thomson, president of global affairs at GlaxoSmithKline, how much his company had already spent on preparing for Brexit. He said that it was £70 million, which GSK would much rather have spent on cancer research. Those are the costs of Brexit to our NHS.

I know that nobody intended to harm the NHS by voting to leave the EU, but it is time to tell the truth: the NHS, which was already struggling, is now on its knees because of the Brexit vote. Brexit represents a threat to its very existence. Brexit should carry a health warning. Medical health experts—60 former presidents and chairs of medical royal colleges, more than two dozen patient groups and healthcare unions—warned before the Brexit vote that this would happen. We are already experiencing a worsening of the staffing crisis and less money. In the future, less access to drugs and significant extra unnecessary challenges to research will collectively harm the NHS. Is it all worth it?

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

3.2 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to PC Keith Palmer. It is a privilege to serve in this place, and an even greater privilege to be protected by courageous, selfless public servants such as PC Keith Palmer. It is tragic that he had to give his life to defend those working in and visiting the Palace. We will remember him, and are doing so today.

What the Government are doing in relation to Brexit, and what the prominent supporters of Brexit have inflicted on this country, is unpardonable. I get angrier and angrier as the ramifications of the decision become clearer. Hon. Members mentioned customs. If we do not get the seamless, frictionless deal that is promised, and small and medium-sized enterprises in this country that export to the EU are required to fill in a customs form, the Institute for Government estimates that that will cost them £30. That cost will add nothing whatever to those businesses.

The UK has been a major player in the European Aviation Safety Agency, but we are at risk of coming out of it. If we go back in, we will be subject to the European Court of Justice.

To bring the debate back to the NHS, what will Brexit do to the Institute of Cancer Research in Belmont, in a neighbouring constituency, and its ability to recruit staff and work co-operatively with other EU countries and institutions? I think this is unpardonable.

Yesterday, the Government made one of the very few of their announcements I have welcomed—the pay increase for staff. I intervened on the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and asked about its impact on the recruitment and retention of EU staff, among others. Of course, as several hon. Members have mentioned, the NHS has been hit by a triple whammy. First, the UK is much less welcoming. That is a direct consequence of Brexit. Those who supported it, who say we are creating a global Britain, need to go out and talk to people and find out that we have left a perception of the UK as an insular country that does not welcome people from abroad. The value of the pound has gone down. Because the pound has crashed, it is much more attractive, particularly for nursing staff who used to come from places such as Portugal, Spain and Italy and remit money to their home countries to support their families, to work in Germany or France. Of course, we are in the bizarre position of choosing to make our trading arrangements with the EU much harder at a point when it seems that every single EU economy is growing faster than ours. We are at the bottom of the pile, so many of the citizens who would have come to this country to work in the NHS will see that their economies are growing faster than ours and that many more jobs are available in their home countries. Therefore, there is less inclination to come here. The NHS, like many other sectors, has been hit by that triple whammy.

Many Members have mentioned the impact on staffing levels, qualifications and retention, but I want to focus on one issue that I do not think other Members have mentioned. The Minister supported Brexit, and I want to understand whether he took into account the impact of our leaving the EU with respect to the falsified medicines directive. I suspect that there was not much small print behind that £350 million extra for the NHS every week, and it certainly did not include a reference to the impact of the UK coming out of the EU in relation to the directive. For those not familiar with it, an EU-wide system ensures that medicines used in the NHS are known to be genuine, rather than being something created in a sweatshop in India, which is not what the packet says. The system is about making sure that everything used in the health service in the EU is genuine, not falsified.

As I understand it, partly as a result of Brexit, the UK has not started building the database required. I see the Minister sending a note back to his officials. I hope that they know the answer. The work has not yet been started on the UK database, but it needs to be in place by February 2019. If it is not, we shall not have the guarantee that the medicines we use here are safe. The Government have apparently said that they definitely want to be part of the database or this arrangement, which is welcome, but it is not clear whether they want to be part of it after Brexit. We need to know immediately from the Minister whether they do want that, and whether the database will be in place by February 2019. If it is not, we shall be at risk of not being able to supply medicines that we are certain are safe.

This may of course be one of those cases when one of the famous red lines on the role of the European Court of Justice may have to be smudged a little bit. My understanding is that the database, and certainly the data within it, would be subject to the ECJ, and therefore if we want to be part of it we will have to swallow the

fact that the ECJ will rule over the use of the associated data. That is just one small example of the many—probably millions—of different impacts that Brexit has had where we gain nothing. What we gain is additional cost. We are putting burdens on business. We are certainly not going to get any health benefits. The Minister will be alone in this debate, I think, in trying to find some silver lining in the Brexit cloud in relation to the NHS, because no one else has. He does not have any supporters there in his ranks weighing in behind him, saying “Brexit is brilliant for the NHS; Brexit is what we want for our healthcare.” It is solely on his shoulders. Of course, Mr Davies cannot weigh in, although I know he might be tempted to, but the Chair is not allowed to. So the Minister is alone. Even though he was a Brexit supporter, I suspect that even he does not actually believe that there is anything whatsoever to be gained by Brexit for the NHS.

Mr Bradshaw: Does the right hon. Gentleman think that it is significant that the only Conservative Back Bencher to come and speak in this debate focused his remarks almost entirely on the benefits he saw of importing Chinese and Indian homeopathic medicine to this country? Does that not give the impression that there is such a paucity of positive arguments that they were the only ones that anyone could come up with?

Tom Brake: I think neither the right hon. Gentleman nor I would like to read too much into that contribution. I doubt very much whether it is established Government policy. The hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) is very much an outlier in terms of his approach towards the health service generally.

Now that the Minister has had time to get some information on the falsified medicines directive, I hope he can provide some assurances that the UK will play a part, and will have a database up and running in time for us to be part of that, and he will swallow—although no doubt he was one of the people who said that over his dead body would the ECJ have any impact on us here—the role of the ECJ so that we can be a participant in something that is clearly beneficial from a health point of view, beneficial to patients and to the United Kingdom.

My final point is that the Department of Health and Social Care has asked Ernst and Young to conduct an assessment of the potential implications for the supply of medicines following the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union. As I understand it, that was started in March last year and I believe the work was finished in June. I may be wrong and I am sure the Minister will take pleasure in correcting me if I am, but if I am right, we are entitled to know when this is going to be published. We have a nasty suspicion, just as we did with the sectoral analyses and the impact assessments, that the Government are more interested in hiding the impact of Brexit from us than they are in making these reports public.

I am sure that that report would have gone into extensive detail about the potential implications for the supply of medicines following our withdrawal from the EU, and I doubt very much that it will have found anything very positive about those implications. If that report has been published and I missed it, I apologise, but if it has not, I hope the Minister will be able to set

out when it will be published, and published in its entirety, so that we can all assess the impact of Brexit on the supply of medicines.

3.13 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I want to associate myself with the remarks made by colleagues about the tragic anniversary we are observing today.

If this Government deliver Brexit, we must negotiate a good deal for our healthcare institutions, our outstanding staff and us—the patients. I understand that we all have good intentions—no one here wants a bad Brexit deal—but I would like to hear from the Minister today how the Government’s stated intention to do no harm to the health service in each part of the UK is going to be delivered in practice.

We know already that the Government’s negotiating record in the talks is poor. After stating that we were going to take back control of our fishing industry, they have managed to deliver a deal for the transition period that no one—not one fisherman nor any MP—believes is in the best short-term interests of the industry. How will the Government ensure that we get a healthy Brexit deal for today, tomorrow and the future?

I am proud to have University Hospital Wishaw in my constituency. It is a large employer and provides healthcare across neighbouring constituencies as well. When patients use the facilities there, they want to know that they are getting the best healthcare possible. That is far more important to them than where their healthcare professional originally came from.

In preparing for the debate, I read reams of statistics and briefings from organisations representing medical professionals, such as More United, Healthier IN the EU, Scientists for EU, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Midwives, and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, to name a few. All their research paints the same gloomy picture: EU and EEA doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals who have left, and those who are considering leaving the UK, are leaving gaps in healthcare provision. There is also likely to be a crisis in social care as regulations tighten and people stop seeking work in the UK after Brexit.

It is incumbent on the UK Government, to which immigration is reserved, to ensure that healthcare professionals and social care workers from EU countries are encouraged and welcomed here, or there will be a serious drop in the high standards that patients expect from their NHS. The Scottish Government estimate that non-UK citizens account for approximately 5% of the NHS workforce in Scotland and around 6.8% of Scotland’s doctors. They have to estimate, as that data is held only at UK level because immigration is a UK matter. That seriously affects effective workplace planning by NHS Scotland. This issue needs to be addressed by the UK Government as a matter of priority.

Those EU nationals who want to stay and work in our NHS, and who want settled status, should be prioritised. It would be a real acknowledgement of what they do for our most vulnerable citizens if the costs of that process were met by the UK Government. The UK Government also need to ensure that there are regular reviews of the

[Marion Fellows]

tier 2 shortage occupation list, so that specific staff shortages can be addressed. That should include medical research and the pharmaceuticals sector. We need to retain access to the best staff available, no matter where they come from.

Once Britain leaves the EU, we must retain frameworks and regulations that allow us to co-operate fully with the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency and the European Medicines Agency. That would allow for the smoothest transition, in terms of the authorisation of medicines for use in the UK, safety and pharmacovigilance. That is what patients and clinicians need. We also need a sufficient transitional period following the current negotiation process to allow for the development of robust, deliverable regulatory processes that do not disadvantage the UK and its citizens.

As has already been referred to, the Scottish life sciences sector is important. It employs 37,000 people, contributes more than £4 billion of turnover and £2 billion of gross value added to the Scottish economy, and is growing at around 6%. The life sciences sector in Scotland is distinct from the UK sector, in that med-tech and diagnostics companies comprise nearly half of it, with pharmaceuticals at 5%. The Government must take that into account in any future negotiations.

It is comforting to UK nationals who live in another EU country that, on the day the UK leaves the EU, they will still be eligible for the same healthcare as citizens there and will still be able to use the European health insurance card scheme when visiting another EU country. But what about UK citizens who, for example, require regular dialysis? Will leaving the EU mean that they will never be able to travel abroad?

We need to retain close links with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Potential pandemics will require the sharing of information. Notification of communicable diseases must not stop, and there has to be cross-border co-operation on those and other serious health threats.

Future trade agreements must not be allowed to impact on health and social care in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament's European and External Relations Committee inquiry into the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP, stated:

"The protection of public services in Scotland, particularly NHS Scotland, was a key concern of those giving evidence to the Committee."

Despite reassurances from the European Commission and the UK Government, the Committee remained

"concerned about the definitions of public services and whether the reservations contained in the final agreement would protect the full range of public services that are delivered in Scotland."

We need to be clear that any future trade deals by the UK Government should explicitly address issues in order to protect the NHS from unintended consequences.

Out of a group of 60 or so proponents of the hardest of Brexits, not one is present to set out the pro-Brexit case for the NHS. They are not here, because they have no positive case to make. At its core, leaving the EU will damage the NHS and provide a worse service for patients.

Every step must be taken to protect the NHS across the UK from being hampered in its life-saving work. Patients deserve the best, and physicians, nurses, clinicians

and those requiring social care should also get the best deal possible. Our life sciences, med-tech and diagnostic sector should be protected. We need to work with the EU on regulatory processes and disease prevention control. We must protect our most vulnerable citizens.

3.22 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is nice to see you in the Chair, Mr Davies.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) on bringing this debate to Westminster Hall today. It is a very important debate, which is part of a much bigger debate going on in households and workplaces, such as the Vale of Leven Hospital and the Golden Jubilee National Hospital in my constituency.

Let me also associate myself with the words many have said about the loss of PC Keith Palmer last year. Due to their sacrifice, we are able to be here to debate today.

On some of the other Members who have spoken, I am sure it will come as no surprise to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), who had to leave early, my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams), the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) and my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows)—for *Hansard*, what I say sounds like "Wishy" but it is spelt "Wishaw"—that I agree probably with everything they have said. As for the hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), I am sure that they will appreciate I slightly disagree that inviting the People's Republic of China into the NHS structure is the best way forward and a good argument for Brexit. We have already sacrificed the nuclear energy industry to that, and it is not going well.

Many people are quietly and rightly concerned about the impact of Brexit on our national health services—I say to *Hansard* that that is in the plural because there is more than one NHS structure in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—and their social care partnerships. Members have touched on that this afternoon, on the high numbers of EU nationals who are employed across those sectors and on the valuable contribution that those workers provide in areas across our communities.

In Scotland, EU nationals in the workforce are employed across all sectors. They play a critical role in our communities and in the NHS. Communities across these islands and the NHS health and social care systems have benefited greatly from the contribution made by staff and, yes, volunteers in those sectors from across the European Union. Citizens volunteer to gain experience, and a lot of EU citizens who engage with NHS structures across the UK have used volunteering to provide a service free of charge, so we must ensure their long-term futures are confirmed and not left in limbo.

To illustrate a point, I have been contacted by constituents who work in the NHS and its social care partners who are extremely worried by the manner in which the Government have approached the situation. They feel they are being used as political pawns in a game of chess where all the pieces have yet to be put out on the board. They have seen a lack of preparation in the Government's approach to leaving the European Union.

We should use this debate to celebrate the selfless individuals providing services within our NHS and social care partnerships. Instead, here we are having to protect them. If that is how EU nationals are being treated, as many Members have intimated today, what message does it send to people around the world, whether they are from Australia, India, Brazil, New Zealand or even the United States, who are considering bringing their skills, talents and enthusiasm to the NHS structures across the UK?

As a Scottish constituency MP, I hope that Scotland will at least strive to be a welcoming nation—I am sure the rest of the UK would as well—as we aim to attract the best talent to our universities and our health and social care workforce. From my perspective, the effects of Brexit will have a profoundly detrimental impact on that goal of being an inclusive society.

Since the creation of the NHS system, the world of medicine has moved on, and with growing patient needs, particularly from an ageing population, as well as the complex needs and conditions that are associated with that, we must ensure that our NHS structures and the interdependent health and social care partnerships have the ability to move with the times.

Some years ago, the Scottish Government, through the Scottish Parliament, passed legislation to integrate—quite early in the UK—the health and social care sectors to ensure a higher standard of care to meet the challenges of dealing with more complex population needs. That has been extremely beneficial for those delivering services, such as the NHS, local authorities, the third sector, which has yet to be mentioned, staff, and volunteers. More importantly, it is critical for those who rely upon the public service being delivered.

However, with the number of EU nationals moving to the UK declining and those already here anxious about their future, everyone in these islands could receive a double hit with the loss of talent of those who are qualified to work in both the health and social care sectors. There is also the issue of cross-border activity in health sector situations. That is not the border between the EU and the English channel or the North sea, but the one that everyone keeps forgetting: the land border of over 300 miles between the UK and the 500 million citizens of the European Union in the isle of Ireland. It shocks me that we have yet to hear about that in this debate.

We only need to go back to 2016 after the European Union referendum when Derry City and Strabane District Council, in conjunction with Donegal County Council, published the report on the impact of Brexit on Derry/Londonderry north-west city region, which was damning about the impact of Brexit on shared services, practical healthcare services, GP-led services and surgery services between County Donegal and the Strabane District Council region of Northern Ireland. It is shocking that that has yet to come up in the debate.

The people who work and volunteer in the NHS and those who rely on the NHS need assurances that services will not be harmed. I hope the Minister will be able to discuss some of that in their response and that patient care will not be downgraded. They need more than a simple slogan on the side of a bus.

Many of the challenges that the NHS structures and social care partnerships across the UK face, including those in Scotland, are not exclusive to the mainland of

the UK. They also impact on Northern Ireland. The Government must take responsibility and action to fully assess the potentially damaging impact of Brexit on the delivery of health and social care. I look forward to the Minister summing up how the Government will answer many of the questions posed by me and other Members today.

3.29 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I join other Members who have expressed their remembrance and condolences to the families of those who died last year, particularly PC Keith Palmer. There was a very moving service in Westminster Hall this morning, which was a very fitting tribute to those who lost their lives this time last year.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for securing this extremely important debate on one of the aspects of our exit from European Union that has not received the attention that I believe it warrants.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) on the extremely clear way he introduced the subject. As someone who has served in the Foreign Office and as a Health Minister, before becoming a member of the Health Committee, he is perhaps more qualified than most to address many of the issues that we have discussed. He talked about the Select Committee report and how the wrong deal or no deal at all will be extremely damaging to the NHS in a series of ways, most of which I will touch on. It was also clear from his comments that there is a need for the Government to have a strategy in place to deal with the potential impact of no deal. It would be useful to hear from the Minister on that.

I agree with my right hon. Friend about the loss of the European Medicines Agency to Amsterdam. It was a matter of great regret that we lost that wonderful institution. The fact that there were so many countries bidding to take it over shows how important it is to individual member states. My right hon. Friend set out some of the risks of no deal, leaving us on World Trade Organisation arrangements, with the potential risk of the seizing up of the medical supply chain. He also talked about staffing, which most hon. Members touched on. He gave the stark example of the number of midwives from the EU. If the current rate of attrition continues, we will have no EU midwives left in a decade. I remind hon. Members that we already have 3,500 midwife vacancies. He also talked about research and gave some clear examples of how investment is being lost now, before we have actually left the EU, and the impact on reciprocal care.

My right hon. Friend also touched on several things that were not in the report, but which are also important, such as the fiscal impact of our leaving, the potential risk to food standards and, of course, the risks from future trade deals. It is ironic that the NHS and other public services are specifically exempted from trade deals at the moment, as a result of agreements that we have with the EU.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick). I commend him for the ingenious way he got subjects of great importance to him into the debate, but I think that is probably the best I can say

[Justin Madders]

about the contribution, so I will move on. I am sure he will continue to fight for those things that are extremely important to him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) spoke from his experience as a passionate campaigner on health issues in his constituency. He set out the importance of the NHS is in his constituency and his pride in what it has achieved. I would characterise what he said about the current situation for services in his constituency as a damage limitation exercise. He gave a startling figure about the number of EU staff who have already taken legal advice on their positions. That should be a very clear warning that uncertainty is still very much in the forefront of people's minds. He set out well how staffing will be affected in London more than in other regions.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) set out powerfully how important the NHS is and how people feel strongly about it in their hearts. She is right that we need to show staff how much we value them. She also set out the importance of reciprocal arrangements for qualifications and, indeed, for healthcare. She raised the importance of clinical trials, particularly in relation to rare diseases. I am sorry I did not get the chance to hear her singing the other week. She was absolutely right that there are particular risks for rare diseases and the development of new medicines. She was also right when she said that Brexit can seem a little abstract to people, but she and other hon. Members have set out in tangible ways how Brexit will affect many of the things that we hold dear.

It was a pleasure to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams), as always. He is one of those people whom we rely on in the NHS to keep the service going, and he rightly paid tribute to the whole range of professions, and the services provided by NHS staff. Of course, it is the staff who make the service what it is. He was right to say that the message is not getting through to EU staff about the future. We need to do more to reassure them. He clearly set out the gravity of the situation, in relation to the impact on staff. He was right to say that some impacts of Brexit are being felt now. GlaxoSmithKline provides evidence of that: about £70 million that could have been spent on cancer research being spent on preparations for Brexit was certainly a startling figure, and not one that we might expect to see on the side of a bus.

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) raised an important point about protections that we need to maintain against bogus medicines. I hope that the Minister will be able to provide reassurance about the falsified medicines directive. The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) talked about the importance of the Scottish life sciences sector and, in particular, its distinctiveness in relation to the sector in the rest of the UK. She also raised important issues about staff.

I want to say something about those from whom we have not heard today. As several hon. Members have observed, not one Back Bencher who campaigned to leave has come to speak in the debate. That is the same as in November when we discussed the future of the European Medicines Agency. No Back Benchers who advocated leave came along and spoke. There is a lack

of ownership, candour and realism from people who campaigned to leave about the consequences of the vote and I would have welcomed a contribution from those Members.

The issues are, as we have discussed, of central importance. We have heard today how almost every aspect of the NHS could be affected by Brexit. Those issues were not articulated in the referendum, but whatever side of the debate people were on, no one, I believe, voted with the intention of causing damage to the NHS. It is our duty to vote according to our conscience, but we must make sure that when we leave the EU we do so in a way that protects and defends the NHS, which is so valued by so many, and that the Government will be held to account for the decisions that they take in the process.

Last year, more nurses and midwives left the profession than joined. Much of that is attributable to the way morale in the health service has plummeted in recent years. The exodus is even more pronounced among staff from the European economic area. As Members have mentioned, according to the Nursing & Midwifery Council, the number of EEA nurses and midwives joining the register decreased by 89% in the past year, while the number who left increased by 67%. That is exacerbating an already parlous situation. The NHS has about 40,000 nursing vacancies at the moment. To put things in terms that the Foreign Secretary might understand, we are missing enough nurses to fill 450 double-decker buses.

It is not just in nursing and midwifery that we face those issues. Figures from the Royal College of Physicians show that 9.3% of doctors working in the NHS are from EU member states, while, according to the General Medical Council, the number of new doctors coming from the EU fell by 9% last year. As the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow said, a survey of doctors showed that 45% of EU doctors were now considering leaving, with a further 29% saying they were unsure about the future. Given that 60% of junior doctors already report working on a rota with a permanent gap, and 45% of advertised consultant posts are not being recruited to, that is an extremely worrying position. A number of surveys have shown that one of the key reasons EU citizens are leaving is that they believe there is uncertainty about their future status. It is simply not good enough that the Government's plans for migration will not be available until the end of this year.

I would be grateful if the Minister updated us, if he is able to, about when the immigration White Paper and Bill will be introduced. I also urge him, as I am sure other Members will, to be as loud and as clear as he can in reassuring EU staff in the NHS that they are valued and have a right to stay.

We welcome the fact that EEA citizens and their family members will be able to apply for settled status. How that will work in practice remains unclear and it is concerning that the new system will have issues, because when we look at the way the current tier 2 system operates, we see that it is hardly an exemplar of perfection. The Royal College of Physicians has stated that it is aware of 44 examples under the existing system whereby junior doctors have had certificates of sponsorship refused, due to increases in salary requirements. Will the Minister let us know what representations he is making on this particular issue and what the Government

will do to try to solve this particular difficulty? Can he also reassure us that the new system that we have for EEA residents will not have similar problems?

In addition to the issues that I have raised about the potential impact on recruitment and retention, many hard-working NHS workers have also spoken about their concerns about impacts on their terms and conditions. As the Minister knows, at Health questions recently we discussed the increasing trend in NHS trusts setting up subsidiary companies. Of course, staff in those companies should be protected by TUPE regulations—legislation that is, of course, derived from the acquired rights directive. So I hope that the Minister can reassure those staff that there are no plans or intentions to water down TUPE regulations, and that they will be implemented in UK law in the form that they take now.

There is also a concern about other EU legislation and the possible threat to the working time directive, which provides safeguards not only for staff but for patients. I understand that last December various royal colleges wrote to the Prime Minister, asking for assurances that the directive would be implemented in UK law, but they have not had any such assurances.

We know from the most recent survey that around 60% of staff have concerns about their work-life balance, and they said that they were working unpaid additional hours, along with the increasing reliance on overtime in hospitals. It is important that we get a clear and unambiguous statement that the working time directive in relation to weekly hours will not be amended or watered down in any way.

Of course, the impact of Brexit will not just be on staff. If we do not secure the best outcome in the negotiations, there could be implications for access to treatments and reciprocal healthcare. As I said earlier, last November I spoke in Westminster Hall in a debate on the European Medicines Agency and it is fair to say that at that time there was some way to go before we had clarity about what the future arrangements will be, so I would be grateful if the Minister updated us today on any progress in that regard.

The Office of Health Economics recently set out just how stark the impact could be if a solution is not found in this area, because it warns that the average lag in submission for a marketing authorisation in the UK could be up to three months, that up to 15% of applications could be submitted more than a year after the EEA submission, and that some products may not be marketed in the UK at all. At the time of its analysis in January, the OHE found that 45% of applications had not been submitted to Australia, Canada or Switzerland following submission to the EMA, so can the Minister give us assurances that we will not be left behind when it comes to gaining early access to medicines and technologies?

In November, I also asked the Minister to confirm that Department of Health budgets would not be used to fund any additional Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency costs. Again, we have not had any confirmation of that and again I would be grateful if the Minister provided reassurance in that respect today, as we know that NHS budgets are already extremely stretched.

As we also know, there are risks arising from the decision to withdraw from Euratom, simply because it falls under the jurisdiction of the European Court of

Justice, because of course Euratom facilitates a free trade in nuclear material, including radioisotopes, and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter said, those materials degrade very quickly. They cannot be stockpiled, so it is essential that there are no delays to imports.

Mr Bradshaw: Is my hon. Friend able to say whether we will support the Euratom amendment that was passed in the House of Lords two days ago when it comes back to the House of Commons? That would be warmly welcomed on both sides of the House.

Justin Madders: That is slightly outside my brief, but I understand the intention behind the question and hope that we will be able to come back on it positively.

There are concerns about the risks to patient care. Will the Minister set out how he expects us to address those?

The free movement of people was presented very much as a one-way street during the referendum. We know that about 1.2 million UK citizens live in other EU member states. There is a risk that if a similar arrangement on reciprocal healthcare is not implemented after we leave, that could impact on the arrangements those people enjoy. This could cause a huge amount of disruption for patients and health services. It will probably affect those with the most serious conditions most, in particular those with kidney failure who may not be able to travel in future if assurances are not gained. I would be grateful if the Minister updated us on that.

Finally, I would like to say a few words on the impact on social care. According to NHS Digital, it is estimated that about 7% of people in the social care sector, or 95,000 people, are EU citizens. That figure varies for different parts of the country. Recent estimates suggest that the social care sector will face a considerable staff shortage if EU migration is limited, particularly if visas are restricted on the basis of income. Projections from the Nuffield Trust suggest that there could be a shortfall of as many as 70,000 social care workers by 2025. Again, will the Minister set out what steps the Government plan to mitigate the potential impact on social care and staff? Can he assure us that we will have an immigration system that addresses staffing needs in the future?

Nobody voted to leave the NHS worse off. Nobody voted to reduce their access to treatments. Nobody voted to make themselves less safe if they require treatment. Nobody voted to reduce the number of staff in our hospitals. Yet all those scenarios are possible if the Government do not get the negotiations right. Members of all parties have expressed their concerns and the need for clarity. I hope that the Minister can now provide that.

3.47 pm

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. May I begin my joining colleagues in remembering PC Keith Palmer and all those injured in the attack this time last year?

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) on securing the debate. He is a former Minister of State for Health. It is always interesting to hear from him both in his capacity on the Committee

[Stephen Barclay]

and with the experience he brings to the House on health issues. I also pay tribute to the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee for the very informative report that was published this week.

I will start by addressing workers' rights, which were raised by the shadow Minister. The Government have made it very clear that there is a commitment to protect workers' rights and to ensure that they keep pace with changing labour markets. We do not need to be part of the EU to have strong protections for workers. The Government have a very strong commitment on that.

One of the key points raised by colleagues during the debate was the workforce. I am happy to respond constructively to the challenge set by the shadow Minister to send a strong message to EU staff within the NHS on how valued and essential they are. Healthcare professionals are internationally mobile. They are a key component of the NHS. There is consensus across the House on how valued they are as a part of the NHS, and that is very much part of the Government's approach.

The NHS is a people business. Two thirds of what we spend in the NHS is on staff costs, so it is absolutely essential that there is a clear message to NHS staff. That extends to the people who are trying to re-run the referendum debate and go back to past arguments, who ignore the fact that, according to the latest figures, which go up to September 2017, there are 3,200 more EU nationals working in the NHS than at the time of the referendum.

Dr Paul Williams: There might be more EU nationals working in the NHS, but the number of EU clinicians has reduced. I believe that our points about doctors, nurses and midwives are still valid.

Stephen Barclay: There has been a slight reduction in nurses; the situation is more textured for clinicians as a whole. The hon. Gentleman did not touch on the fact that there are almost twice as many doctors from the rest of the world than from the EU. The NHS recruits internationally, and that will still be the case after Brexit. The Prime Minister has signalled repeatedly that the UK will be open to the brightest and best, and that will continue to be the case regardless of the deal we do.

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): Looking to the future, doctors from outside the EU are currently subject to a strict regime, and at the moment the demand for sponsorship certificates showing that an NHS trust wants to employ a doctor seems to exceed the supply. Will doctors from the EU who want to come to our country post Brexit be subject to the same regime, or does the Minister envisage a different regime? What representations is he making to the Home Office about that matter as we look forward to the immigration Bill?

Stephen Barclay: Of course we are making representations to the Home Office, but the Prime Minister has signalled our commitment to attracting the brightest and best, and that will continue. What has been negotiated so far probably gives the hon. Gentleman the best signal. What the Prime Minister announced in December and what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union announced this week about

a transition deal actually protects the rights of EU citizens. That underscores the Government's commitment to ensuring that a positive message is sent to EU staff in the NHS.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I thank the Minister for giving way and apologise for not making a fuller contribution to this important debate; I had a long-standing commitment as Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee that could not be delayed.

On the workforce, will the Minister comment on a small area that the Committee highlighted in its report but which many people are not aware of: the role of qualified persons? That is the individuals who are legally responsible for batch-testing drugs before they are released on to the market or made available for clinical trials. Will he pay close attention to the problems that will arise and the impact on clinical trials and the safety of medicines if qualified persons are no longer recognised in the UK after it leaves the European Union? That workforce is in great demand, and there is clear evidence that many of them will have to leave to the EU if that happens, leaving Britain short.

Stephen Barclay: I am very happy to recognise my hon. Friend's point, which is well made. As she knows, I am keen to have close discussions with her about such issues. However, through our adoption of the *acquis* into UK law, our desire for a transition deal, our protection of workers' rights and our clear signal to EU citizens, the Government have signalled that we are committed to working collaboratively with the EU and to maintaining high standards. Indeed, science and healthcare is one of the areas where collaboration is best and where the EU has the strongest desire to maintain that collaboration. We work from firm foundations as we take on some of these specific issues, which the Department will continue to explore.

At the same time as attracting talent from overseas—from both the EU and beyond—we should not lose sight of the importance of growing our own workforce. Again, the Government have clearly signalled our intention in that regard, with a 25% expansion of undergraduate places for nursing and our announcement earlier this week of five new medical training centres, in Sunderland, Lincoln, Lancashire, Chelmsford and Canterbury. There is a clear desire to strengthen training for the existing workforce.

That sits alongside other initiatives, such as apprenticeships and ensuring that there are different pathways for people to progress in the NHS. That will ensure that people can develop their careers at different stages, so that someone who enters the system as a healthcare assistant, for example, is not trapped in that role but is able to progress through the nursing associate route and go on to be a qualified nurse. There are myriad ways in which we need to ensure that the NHS has the right skills.

That brings me to my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), who talked about broadening the base of practitioners, an issue on which he has campaigned assiduously for many years. I agree that we do need to broaden the base. That must always be addressed in an evidence-based manner. He cited an interesting *BMJ* report. However, initiatives are already under way to look at how we have a broader base and

more of a multidisciplinary team, for example with physician assistants working alongside GPs in addition to nurses. The issues he raised speak to that.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) referred to people leaving. In fact, he said that people are voting with their feet, but that is slightly at odds with the fact that there is a net increase in EU staff. It is important that we in this House do not give a sense of negativity or rerunning past arguments on the referendum but start to look forward and reassure people on how much they are welcomed.

A point that came out of remarks by the right hon. Member for Exeter and a number of colleagues in the debate was about the life sciences industry. Again, one did not really get a sense of the reality. The reality is that last year London secured the most investment of any city in Europe—that is post-referendum. Therefore, the doom and gloom and sense that everything is drifting from our life science industry—

Tom Brake: Would the Minister like to speculate on when decisions on that investment were made?

Stephen Barclay: I do not know the precise date but, having come to the House from a corporate career, I know that decisions can usually be stopped if there is a concern. The gestation is often for a longer period, but that does not mean that the decision cannot be stopped. The right hon. Gentleman may be able to point to one or two decisions, but there have been a number of significant decisions in the life sciences industry. I look at the investment in Oxford and Cambridge and, for example, the commitment of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and its significant investment in the life sciences industry. I also look to the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) has done on the life sciences industry in terms of the golden triangle of London, Oxford and Cambridge. This is a sector that we should be championing, not talking down.

There has been significant investment in the life sciences industry in the past 12 months. It is perfectly valid for colleagues to raise concerns and to recognise the need for the Department to reassure and address specific issues as part of our planning for Brexit. However, it is misleading to suggest that this industry is not thriving when we see the highest investment in Europe coming to the UK, we see 3.5% of the global market coming into the UK and we see Oxford and Cambridge—the golden triangle, as it is termed—thriving in the way we have seen in recent months. Kent Council has been getting in on the act with NCL Technology Ventures, which has put further money into forward-looking medical technology. Even local authorities are recognising the benefits of investment in the life sciences. International and domestic investors are coming together in this area. It is beholden on us in these debates to better reflect the reality of what is happening.

I am always keen to listen to the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams), who always speaks with authority on medical matters, not least as he is a practising clinician. However, on this occasion I fear he strayed into Treasury matters when he started to talk about the UK growth forecast diminishing. As a former Treasury Minister, I was particularly interested in his remarks, and I gently point out that they were at odds with the

Office for Budget Responsibility. The OBR is clear that the growth forecast for 2019 and 2020 is 1.3%. That rises to 1.4% in 2021 and to 1.5% in 2022. The OBR recently improved its growth forecast.

Dr Williams: I agree that I am straying into Treasury matters, but I have read the IMF's forecasts for the UK economy for 2019, which were downgraded from 1.6% to 1.5%, when many of our closest partners, including the United States, Germany and Canada, were upgraded. I have also seen that the UK's economic growth has fallen from the highest in the G7 to the lowest. That has all happened since our decision to leave the European Union. Is it not true that the IMF predicts that our economic growth will be less than it would have been if we had not made that decision?

Stephen Barclay: We can see the variability of forecasts, but the OBR's forecast, which is the one that really matters—there is consensus that the Government rely on it and that Government planning is undertaken on the basis of it—shows a clear trajectory of improvement that is not reflected in much of the doom and gloom that we have heard in recent weeks. The debate is better informed if we tie it into the benchmarking that the Government use when setting fiscal policy.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) commented on the fact that her constituents are bored by the length of the Brexit debate. I am sure that if anyone is watching the debate, that will resonate with them. That is why it is so important for us to look forward. We should look at the areas of real concern where the Department needs to focus, such as maintaining the regulation and considering the mutual recognition of qualifications, which is a real issue that we want to make progress on with the European Union, because it is of concern to people. To look constructively at how we address some of those issues is far better than having groundhog day on the same areas.

Dr Cameron: Given the evidence we heard, and given that I have emphasised how critical the NHS is to the public and that it is a key priority for Brexit, I am perplexed that the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care does not have a place at the Brexit table in Cabinet. Far be it for me to try to elevate him even further, but the NHS is crucial and pivotal and deserves to be at the core of Brexit.

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Lady is right to recognise the skills and talent that the Secretary of State brings to this debate as to many others. It is no coincidence that he is the second-longest serving Secretary of State for Health. It would be recognised across the House that it is a demanding job. It is to his great credit that he has been in post for such a period and that he has championed patient safety in the way that he has, which the shadow Minister has generously recognised on occasion.

The Secretary of State's role in Government was further signalled and underscored by the Prime Minister in the recent reshuffle, when the responsibility for social care was added to the Department. As the debate has reflected, social care, and how we address it from an immigration perspective, and from a training and upskilling perspective, is one of the key legitimate areas of the Brexit debate. We are focused on that in our discussions with the Home Office and others.

[Stephen Barclay]

The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) picked up on the need for a transition period. That point reflects the fact that the Government are listening and have responded constructively. I know from my previous role in the financial services sector in the City that there is a strong desire for a transitional period. That point was also raised by many in the healthcare sector. It is to the great credit of the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union that those discussions have been conducted in such a constructive way. There has been a lot of doom-saying and negative commentary—“Nothing will be agreed; it won’t work.”—but he has assiduously stuck to his task. While there are some formal processes still to be completed, significant progress has been made on a transition deal, and there is reasonable consensus that it is constructive.

Several colleagues mentioned the impact of leaving Euratom. I simply remind the House that there is nothing in the Euratom treaty that prevents materials from being exported from an EU member state to countries outside the EU, nor do those materials fall into the category of so-called special fissile material, which is subject to nuclear safeguards. We very much recognise the short half-life of medical radioisotopes and the need for rapid delivery, but again there is much that can be constructively done.

The shadow Minister mentioned subsidiary companies. I do not want to incur your displeasure by straying too far from the subject of Brexit and into subsidiary companies, Mr Davies, but as the shadow Minister raised that point, I feel it is appropriate to address it. He asked what TUPE protections there will be. There are TUPE protections now and the Government have absolutely no intention to change that.

For those who sometimes suggest, as Opposition Members occasionally do, that subsidiary companies within the NHS is a form of privatisation, I merely remind the House that this legislation was passed in 2006 under a Labour Government. I was not in the House at the time, but I do not recall—this may be one for those connoisseurs of *Hansard*—that it was presented by Labour Ministers as a way of achieving privatisation in the NHS. Subsidiary companies are 100% owned by their parent company, which is the NHS family, so they stay very much within that.

John Grogan: Since the Minister has gone in that direction, I ask him again specifically: if it is such a good idea, would it be a good idea for NHS trusts that propose setting up subsidiary companies to publish their business plans so we can see what is happening with that public money?

Stephen Barclay: I am a former member of the Public Accounts Committee. The then Chair, the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), would always talk about following the public pound. The National Audit Office has considerable reach in doing that.

My point is that subsidiary companies are within the NHS family. They are 100% owned by the NHS foundation trust that sets them up. They are a better vehicle than the alternative of contracting out, which gives far less grip over how services are provided. The legislation

passed by a Labour Government is welcome. We should not re-write history and suggest that legislation that was fine in 2006 should suddenly be presented as privatisation.

That goes to what we sometimes see in the Brexit debate—I will bring this back to the Brexit debate, Mr Davies—in terms of a trade deal with the US. We are sometimes told that a trade deal with the US in a Brexit context is alarming and somehow a threat to the NHS, often by the same people who are very positive about the EU. When TTIP was being debated, the EU lead negotiator said TTIP was not a threat to the NHS.

Dr Williams: If there is no threat from a trade deal with the United States, will the Minister rule out the possibility of United States pharmaceutical companies gaining the ability to market directly their products to UK patients in any future trade deal?

Stephen Barclay: My point is that we will have control of our trade deal. The Prime Minister has made it clear that there will be no change in the protections afforded to the NHS. The subject of the debate is Brexit, and we are talking about the difference between being inside and outside the EU. The regulatory controls as they would have been under TTIP will be no different in the new landscape.

I remind the hon. Gentleman, who was very critical of Brexit, that more than 61% of people in Stockton voted to leave the EU. He might think that his voters are misguided and wrong, and that they made a huge error in how they voted, but I hope he agrees that it is right that the Government respect that democratic decision and deliver control over our trade policy.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: The Minister will appreciate that Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union. He seemed to hop, skip and jump over the issue of the border. Will he clarify today, or in writing to Members who are participating in this debate, that the common travel area will extend to a member of NHS staff working in Northern Ireland who happens to be a Romanian or French citizen but lives in the Republic of Ireland, and that they will not be forced to become a citizen of the Republic of Ireland or the United Kingdom after Brexit?

Stephen Barclay: I am very happy to write to the hon. Gentleman about that. The question of the border is for deep negotiation with our European partners. There is a desire on both sides for us to get it right, particularly given the sensitivities in Northern Ireland.

Dr Wollaston: Will the Minister comment on the need for contingency planning, which is one of the central themes of our report? As he knows, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and there is genuine concern that we could have a last-minute no-deal scenario, which would have major implications for supply chains in the life sciences industry. Will he confirm whether he will publish a detailed list of the areas in which contingency planning is taking place? Will he also publish the detailed contingency planning?

Stephen Barclay: The Chair of the Committee is absolutely right about the importance of contingency planning. In the Scottish context, on the steps of No. 10

recently, a critic of the Government as fierce as the First Minister praised the level of discussion between the devolved Government in Scotland and the UK, and her discussions with the Prime Minister.

It may reassure my hon. Friend to hear that the Department has secured additional funding from the Treasury—more than £20 million—as part of our preparation for Brexit. The right hon. Member for Exeter has previously asked in the House whether the Department's preparation and staff resource are at the level that he and other colleagues seek. That is a fair observation, and the situation is continually being improved. Alongside that, considerable work is going on within the wider NHS family—in NHS England, NHS Improvement and elsewhere.

Like the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, I emphasise once again the importance of EU staff within the NHS. They are hugely valued and will continue to be so, and we are keen to protect their workers' rights. That is reflected in the agreements reached by the Prime Minister in December and those reached earlier this week by the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union. Alongside that, considerable work is going on within the Department to address a number of these issues as part of our contingency planning. We continue to seek a very close co-operative deal with our partners in the European Union. In areas such as science, there is a long and strong tradition of working in such a collaborative manner. As part of continuing those preparations, this debate and the Committee's informed report provide much material on which we can work.

4.13 pm

Mr Bradshaw: I thank all colleagues who took part in this extremely important and valuable debate. The Minister suggested that the contributors had a rather doom-and-gloom approach, but all we were doing was reflecting the evidence we heard in the Committee's inquiry. Other Members were reflecting the concerns that had been raised with them by a wide range of professional health organisations, staff bodies, royal colleges and so forth. We are simply the conduit of their concerns.

If I may criticise the Minister, I found what he said a little Panglossian on the dangers and threats, and people's worries, that we highlighted in our report. I should have

liked to hear him say a little more about the vital importance of regulatory alignment. I hope he will think about that and study the report carefully.

Like the Chair of the Committee, I would like the Government to be much more transparent about their contingency planning. The Minister may feel confident that the UK Government will achieve their desire of a pick-and-mix, cake-and-eat-it deal with the European Union, but not many people share that confidence, so in the end we shall have one of two stark choices. It is important that the public should know the choices before Parliament and that the public take a final view.

The Minister has been in the job only a couple of months. I have huge respect for his ability and his record in other Departments, so I hope he will spend some of the Easter recess reading not only our report, if he has not read it already, but some of the evidence given to us by organisations. I hope that will inform him and his ministerial colleagues in fighting the NHS's corner in the context of the negotiations in the next few months. I hope he will listen to and engage with some of the organisations that have been speaking to us.

The Minister is right: the Government have listened on transition, which we welcome. The sectors we have been talking about today welcome it too. Of course, the transition is basically a status quo. Essentially, nothing is going to change. What worries me is that we are simply delaying. We are putting off the evil day when the difficult choices, hard decisions and potential damage have to be faced. It is a delay rather than a solution. In the next few months, we will have to have much clearer answers from the Government about the final end state and solution. Otherwise the concern and uncertainty will go on.

I thank the Minister for his response, other hon. Members for taking part, and you, Mr Davies, for being in the Chair. I am grateful that the Backbench Business Committee gave us the time for the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the effect on the NHS of the UK leaving the EU.

4.17 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 22 March 2018

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

UK Register of Overseas Entities' Beneficial Ownership

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths): I have today published a document summarising the responses we received to last year's call for evidence, which set out proposals for a new world first beneficial ownership register of overseas companies and other legal entities that own UK property or participate in UK Government procurement. This follows the commitment made at the anti-corruption summit in 2016, in order to combat money laundering and achieve greater transparency in the UK property market.

The response to the call for evidence outlines several areas in which policy development has progressed since the publication of the call for evidence. These include proposals for more frequent updates to ensure the timeliness and relevance of the information, and changes in the proposed sanctions to be applied through land registration law to ensure there are no adverse consequences for innocent third parties.

The new register will be the first of its kind in the world, and builds upon the UK's global leadership in tackling corruption. As stated in the call for evidence, the downside of demonstrating such leadership is that the Government do not have an existing model to work from. The Government will therefore look to strike the right balance between improving transparency and minimising burdens on legitimate commercial activity.

The Department is currently working on the preparation of a draft Bill to deliver these proposals, which the Government intend to publish by summer recess this year. Following consideration of comments received post-publication, the Government intend to introduce the legislation early in the second session of this Parliament.

I have placed copies of the Government response to the call for evidence in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS576]

TREASURY

Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Act 1993

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): I am today announcing that the Government intend to legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows to amend the Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Act 1993. This amendment will enable an extension of the cover provided by the Government-backed terrorism reinsurer Pool Re to include business interruption losses that are not contingent on damage to commercial property. I will announce further details in due course.

This Government remain committed to ensuring that businesses can continue to secure insurance against the financial costs of terror attacks.

[HCWS579]

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government Policy

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid): On 30 November 2017, I told the House that I was minded to implement, subject to parliamentary approval, the locally led proposal I had received from West Somerset District Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council to merge, and I invited representations before I took my final decision on this proposal.

Having carefully considered all the representations I have received and all the relevant information available to me, I am today announcing that I have decided to implement, subject to parliamentary approval, the proposal to merge West Somerset District Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council to become a new single district council named Somerset West and Taunton District Council.

I have reached my decision having regard to the criteria for district council mergers that I announced to the House on 7 November 2017. I am satisfied that these criteria are met and that the new district council is likely to improve local government and service delivery in the area, commands a good deal of local support, and that the new council area is a credible geography.

I now intend to prepare and lay before Parliament drafts of the necessary secondary legislation to give effect to my decision. My intention is that if Parliament approves this legislation the new council will be established on 1 April 2019 with the first election to the council held on 2 May 2019.

[HCWS578]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council met on 15 March 2018 in Brussels. I represented the United Kingdom.

Under an agenda item on the European semester, the Council adopted the joint employment report (JER) and Council conclusions on the annual growth survey (AGS).

The Council received a presentation on the 2018 country reports on the implementation of 2017 country specific recommendations.

The Council endorsed the opinion of the Employment Committee (EMCO) on the latest biennial assessment of member states' progress against the non-binding Council recommendation of 2013 on a youth guarantee for tackling youth unemployment.

The Council adopted a recommendation for a European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships.

The Council then conducted policy debates on the future of social Europe post 2020 and closing the gender pay gap: contributing to the achievement of the goals of the European social pillar.

Under any other business, the Commission presented information on its awaited social fairness package, the Commission and the President presented information on the tripartite social summit, and the chairs of the EMCO and the Social Protection Committee (SPC) provided information on their respective 2018 work programmes.

[HCWS575]

Universal Credit

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): The implementation of universal credit continues to make good progress. The full service is now operating in 250 jobcentres and we expect to complete national coverage and be in all jobcentres as planned by December 2018. Within this timetable, I am announcing today some modifications to reflect local considerations and discussions.

We continue to make progress in delivering a Welsh language capability within the full service. While it has always been possible to speak to DWP in Welsh, either

in jobcentres or on the telephone, and to have dialogue in Welsh on online journals, we want to be able to offer full Welsh functionality as soon as we can for those areas of Wales with the highest density of Welsh speakers. In order to increase the chances that functionality will be in place in time with local roll-out, we are moving the 13 jobcentres with the highest density of Welsh speakers to December 2018.

In addition, Barrow Council has asked if its roll-out date could be changed to December to reflect the fact that it is bringing its housing benefit administration back in-house and it would like to sequence that change before universal credit rolls out. This is sensible planning and we have agreed to meet that request.

Finally, in order to balance resources more effectively within DWP we are making several other modifications to the roll-out timetable, as set out in the table available as an online attachment. We will modify the master schedule on gov.uk to reflect these changes. District managers are contacting local stakeholders about these changes and writing to their local MPs with details.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-03-22/HCWS577/>.

[HCWS577]

Petition

Thursday 22 March 2018

OBSERVATIONS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Removal of the Royal Mail postal collection

The petition of residents of Cottenham, South Cambridgeshire,

Declares that the residents and Parish Council of Cottenham in South Cambridgeshire are adversely affected by the removal of the Royal Mail postal collection box on the High Street; and further that the Department of Communities and Local Government should make representations to Royal Mail to re-instate a collection box in the vicinity to better support residents in such rural areas.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Royal Mail to support the earliest possible re-instatement of a collection box in the central section of Cottenham High Street, one of the longest in England.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Heidi Allen, *Official Report*, 27 February 2018; Vol. 636, c. 797.]

[P002112]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths):

Royal Mail is an independent business regulated by Ofcom, the independent sector regulator. The Government do not play any role in Royal Mail's day-to-day operations.

Under Ofcom's regulatory framework, Royal Mail is required to provide post boxes within half a mile (805 meters) of at least 98% of households and business premises across the UK.

We are informed by Royal Mail that, following the relocation of the Post Office in Cottenham from 230 High Street to 145 High Street, the owner of the vacated property asked that the post box be removed as it is located on private property. If requested, Royal Mail will remove post boxes that are on private land.

Royal Mail informed us that it investigated the possibility of re-siting the post box at various locations along the High Street; however the narrow public footpaths or the presence of existing underground utilities at potential sites meant these locations failed its standard suitability checks. Royal Mail has therefore decided to re-site the post box outside the new Post Office premises.

With the relocation of the post box to the new Post Office site, there are five post boxes in the immediate vicinity of the site of the former Post Office, at distances ranging between 400 meters to 800 meters.

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