

Thursday
28 June 2018

Volume 643
No. 162



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 28 June 2018

House of Commons

Thursday 28 June 2018

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON BILL [*LORDS*] (*BY ORDER*)

Second Reading opposed and deferred until Tuesday 3 July (Standing Order No. 20).

ACCOUNT OF THE CONTINGENCIES FUND 2017-18

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House an Account of the Contingencies Fund 2017-18, showing –

- (1) A Statement of Financial Position;
- (2) A Statement of Cash Flows; and
- (3) Notes to the Accounts; together with the Certificate and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon.—
(*Craig Whittaker.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Exports in Global Markets

1. **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): What steps he is taking to promote UK exports in global markets.
[906132]

5. **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): What steps he is taking to promote UK exports in global markets.
[906140]

6. **Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to promote UK exports in global markets.
[906141]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): Mr Speaker, before I begin, I am delighted to announce the appointment of Mark Slaughter as the Department for International Trade's new director general for investment. Mark took up his new role this month and will lead the Department's work on inward and outward investment.

The Department for International Trade provides support to companies in Wales and the rest of the UK through, for example, the GREAT campaign, high value campaigns, the Tradeshow Access Programme and the financial support to exporters offered by UK Export Finance.

Ian C. Lucas: Wrexham pharmaceutical companies, such as Wockhardt and Ipsen Biopharm, export worldwide. Does the Minister agree that it is essential to preserve regulatory alignment to allow them to continue to export and develop in new markets?

Graham Stuart: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who is a great champion of his local exporting businesses. We need the right arrangements going forward to support the strong export growth we have seen. He will note that, since 2010, export growth for Wales has gone up by 82%.

Paula Sherriff: What direct support is being given to businesses that want to export overseas and, crucially, how is it being signposted?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Lady is right to mention the importance of ensuring that British companies know support is in place. In DIT, we have for the first time in our history a Department of State whose only job is to support international economic exports, investment and trade policy. The GREAT campaign has been very significant in promoting that and we have trade advisers throughout the country. Indeed, in Yorkshire and Humber, DIT has 33 mobile and desk-based international trade advisers, who are there explicitly to support local business and to make sure they know what we have on offer.

Mr Sweeney: For the food and drink producers located in my constituency, such as the world famous Tennents brewery and Morrison Bowmore whisky distillery, international trade is an integral part of their business. Can the Minister tell us what his Department is doing to work with Scottish Development International to better promote Scottish businesses, such as the ones I have mentioned, overseas?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Gentleman is right and, along with many of his colleagues, he is a great champion of local businesses. That is why it was particularly disappointing that we saw so many of his colleagues shaking their heads in disbelief when they heard the shadow Secretary of State the other day refusing to support the EU-Canada trade deal and refusing to support the EU-Japan trade deal. He will recall that one of his colleagues said that if the Labour party is not prepared to support a deal with Trudeau's Canada, who on earth would it support a deal with.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): Although it is very welcome to see a rise in exports, Ministers know they are still coming from a relatively small proportion of British businesses. I urge him to challenge business membership bodies to ensure they put exporting at the heart of their work. We need a culture change. They have a role to play.

Graham Stuart: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for all the work he does in supporting international trade. He is absolutely right. We work closely in partnership with, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets regularly, representative business organisations because we need to change the culture. Our assessment is that there are more British companies that could export and do not, than there are who can and do. The opportunity is there. The very welcome growth in exports over recent

years is to be applauded, but there is so much more we can do by working in partnership not only with representative business organisations, but with banks.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): What impact will there be on UK firms exporting around the world if the Trade Bill is not implemented before we leave the EU?

Graham Stuart: Of course, the Trade Bill is fundamental to the continuity of existing EU trade deals. It puts in place the framework to allow us to move them over from the EU to the UK. Labour failed earlier this week to support jobs, and it has repeatedly voted against the very Bill that would allow us to ensure continuation of trade.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Our exports will be more likely to prosper if reciprocal trade is not met with a common external tariff, will they not?

Graham Stuart: What my right hon. Friend is absolutely right about is that there will be real opportunities for the UK when it leaves the EU. The appetite throughout the world is first for continuity, but among so many of our existing trade partners there is also a real desire to deepen that relationship and thus support British exports in a way that, sadly, the shadow Secretary of State seems signally not to do.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): It is not enough, though, simply to promote exports and global trade. They need to be facilitated, which is likely to require new trade deals with our major trading partners, such as the United States. That, however, is not without its risks. When the Minister and the Secretary of State are going about their business promoting trade and starting early discussions about a trade deal, will they make it clear from the outset that our NHS, our public services, our food hygiene rules and important geographic indicators are off limits and out of bounds?

Graham Stuart: I am happy to give those assurances, but earlier this week we saw the Scottish National party—the hon. Gentleman’s party, under his leadership in this area—vote against a deal that fully supports the continuity of existing protections. It is interesting that the Scotch Whisky Association and all the thousands who work in the Scotch whisky business strongly support that deal, whereas the SNP opposed it.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): In May it was reported that the Department was to axe hundreds of jobs in trade promotion—up to 10% of the workforce. The Treasury has since hinted that additional funding is available to safeguard such jobs, but we have heard that the cuts are still happening. Surely the Secretary of State agrees that axing officials whose job is to promote British exports is not the best way to build a “global Britain”. Will he therefore confirm that his Department has not, and will not, cut those jobs?

Graham Stuart: The truth is that the Department is growing. It is less than two years old and it is building its capacity. Today I announced the appointment of a new director general for investment, we recently announced the appointment of a director general for exports, and,

of course, we are soon to complete the appointments of eight HM trade commissioners around the world, who will deploy our resources to best effect.

Trade Deals with Developing Countries

2. **Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of UK trade deals with developing countries on the economies of those countries. [906136]

The Minister for Trade Policy (George Hollingbery): Freeing up trade is a proven driver of prosperity for developing countries. As we leave the EU, our priority will be to seek to deliver continuity in our trading arrangements, including continuity for developing countries.

Iain Stewart: Let me first warmly welcome my hon. Friend to the Dispatch Box.

The EU acts as a protectionist bloc against the trading interests of developing economies. Can my hon. Friend assure me that, once we leave the EU, arranging trade deals with developing economies will be a central part of our post-Brexit arrangements?

George Hollingbery: I certainly can. The Department’s White Paper “Preparing for our future trade policy” sets out the scale of the Government’s desire to help developing countries to break down the barriers to trade, and we will give them the tools with which to trade their way out of poverty.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry that I did not spot the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner), but if he wants to shoehorn his question—

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): You look for your favourites.

Mr Speaker: I most certainly do not look for favourites, but I am always happy to hear from the hon. Gentleman, and if he wants to speak now, he can.

Mr Skinner: It was on the last question, and you know that.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can always shoehorn in his concern on any question, and the Chair is accommodating of him. I hope that his mood will improve as the day proceeds.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): An important issue connected with trade deals is actually a Home Office matter, I refer to the issue of visas. Whether the trade deals are with developing countries or with Australia and New Zealand, the big thing that they talk about is not two-year visas but five-year visas. What work is the Minister doing with the Home Office to bring some sense into this area? Incidentally, that is also needed on the west coast of Scotland in relation to fishing.

George Hollingbery: The hon. Gentleman will know very well that mode 4 is applied in many circumstances, and that it was part of the Japan-EU free trade deal. Our conversations with the Home Office are ongoing,

but it will always be a matter of national policy that we will control our own immigration system. Despite what is said in trade deals, that is protected.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that, whatever agreement is or is not reached with the European Union, after Brexit this country will continue to see increased trade in goods and services with the European Union, developing countries, and other countries around the world?

George Hollingbery: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Clearly, the whole purpose of our leaving the European Union, or one of the plain purposes, is to increase sovereignty and to conduct our own trade deals. We are very keen to do a good deal with Europe—to see frictionless borders and to keep trade going on that front—and indeed to seek wide and ambitious free trade deals with others.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): What will the new Trade Minister do to ensure that any such trade deals with developing countries protect, promote and enhance workers' rights, environmental protection and consumer rights, rather than engaging in a race to the bottom?

George Hollingbery: It is a feature of the free trade deal that is currently being signed by the European Union, and indeed the commitment of this Government, that chapters will be included in all those agreements that will protect exactly the elements that the hon. Lady identifies. They are in the current arrangements that we voted in favour of earlier this week and will be in future trade deals.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the best way of getting countries out of poverty is by trade, and that that is under threat from protectionism? Does he further agree that how we vote in this House, and the measures we support in the House on extending trade, matter?

George Hollingbery: That absolutely matters; it matters fundamentally. Trade is one of the greatest promoters of prosperity on the planet. It supports more poor people into reasonable states of living across the world than almost any other policy. The Opposition voted against such a free trade deal last week—in fact, against two of them. All that can do in the long run is reduce the amount of free trade around the world.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): For the last 10 to 15 minutes, Ministers at that Dispatch Box have been attacking us for voting on principle against a trade agreement the other day. I want to know how many trade deals the Government have turned down with Barnier and the rest of them across in Europe in the last 12 months. Answer!

George Hollingbery: I am very sorry to say, Mr Speaker, that I am not entirely sure that I understand the question, but I would like to correct one element of something I just said. Of course, the Opposition did not vote against both trade deals—they abstained on the Japan trade deal. I am afraid that I simply do not understand the question. All I know is that the trade deals that were

voted on and passed by the House this week had elements that contained many of the protections that the Opposition have said that they want. There are chapters on labour rights and environmental standards, and there is protection for our public services, particularly the national health service, which, as I told the House on Tuesday, is protected from challenge by those agreements.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): What advice does the Minister have for small and medium-sized enterprises that want to do business both inside the EU and outside it, post 29 March next year, in terms of their geographic location? Does he think it would be a good idea for businesses to be based in Northern Ireland, where they can have the best of both worlds?

George Hollingbery: A characteristic of any trade deal that we wish to do with the EU will obviously be to look at the interests of small businesses, which are the lifeblood of our economy. The EU-Japan trade deal that we voted for in the House on Tuesday specifically opened up the markets of Japan to smaller and medium-sized producers in the car manufacturing sector. I hope that those sorts of measures will be reflected in any deal that we do with the EU.

Business Investment Overseas

3. **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support businesses to invest overseas. [906137]

9. **Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): What steps his Department is taking to support businesses to invest overseas. [906145]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): If I may, I would like to begin by paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) for all the work that he did as our Minister of State and for helping to set up the Department. He is one of the very best Ministers that I have had the honour to work with in my whole time in this House.

Since April 2017, the Department for International Trade has actively supported UK companies, with over 50 outward direct investment deals in over 20 countries. With our help, companies from all over the UK have invested overseas in many sectors, including advanced manufacturing, infrastructure and energy.

Maria Caulfield: Sussex sparkling wine is beating French champagne in Parisian wine-tasting challenges. In my constituency we have English sparkling wine producers such as Rathfinny, Ridgeview and Breaky Bottom. What steps is the Department taking to help this industry to invest and export overseas?

Dr Fox: I know that my hon. Friend is a great champion of English wines in her constituency. In fact, Aldwick Court in my own constituency makes a very fine range of wines, Mr Speaker—I will attempt to get you a bottle to prove the point. We work closely with leading industry associations and producers to help to support English wine exports. A recent example of this was the festival of innovation in March in Hong Kong.

Our team in-market arranged a bespoke programme of briefings and a high-profile tasting session to introduce a delegation of UK wine and spirit producers to potential buyers from around the world, very successfully.

Mr Speaker: It all sounds very exciting, I must say.

Jim Shannon: The Secretary of State may not be aware of the input of a Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Minister on this matter, but Lakeland Dairies in my constituency is attempting to secure Chinese business but is having some difficulty due to red tape. What support is available to help businesses across the language and cultural divide, and to gain results that benefit us all and in particular Lakeland Dairies in my constituency?

Dr Fox: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there have been a number of questions about the ease of doing business in China and market access has been one of the questions raised. A new trade commissioner has been appointed, Richard Burn, in China, and our team will work continually with the Chinese Government to try to remove some of the barriers. If companies in the hon. Gentleman's constituency face specific problems, I will be delighted to meet him to try to resolve them.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Last month, the Department's roadshow that encourages small businesses to invest overseas and export visited Immingham in my constituency, and it was greatly valued by local businesses. Does the Department plan to continue and expand that roadshow?

Dr Fox: Of course, we will continue to do that; it is a very successful programme. But perhaps more usefully we can help to get small businesses the finance they require to get into the exporting business. Last year, in a change from the previous pattern, 78% of all the UK export finance agreements were done with small and medium-sized enterprises in this country.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State looked at the impact of tariffs on British investments overseas?

Dr Fox: Tariffs in general are one of the areas we want to be able to look at when we leave the European Union. Of course the setting of tariffs is a legal power that we do not yet have. To be able to take full advantage of alternatives—reductions in tariffs, for example—this House will have to pass the customs Bill, which is coming back shortly. I hope that we can count on the hon. Gentleman's support on that.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Our proceedings would be incomplete and underperforming without a question from Mr Barry Sheerman.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

May I ask the Secretary of State if he is not being a little complacent about the role of China in our manufacturing and other sectors? Does he realise that, when we encourage companies to export, some of the

companies, like Syngenta in my constituency, are wholly owned by ChemChina and wholly owned subsidiaries of the communist Government in China? There is a greater number of British companies owned by the Chinese. Does that alter the sort of conversation he has with them?

Dr Fox: We believe in an open, liberal, global economy and, if we want to own companies overseas, countries overseas have to be able to own companies in this country. That is part of a liberal trading system, but that system requires a proper system of rules. That is why the World Trade Organisation needs to be strengthened and in some areas needs to be reformed, to ensure we have a global trading system that is fair and fit for all.

Trade and Road and Rail Infrastructure

4. **Priti Patel (Witham) (Con):** What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on the potential merits for future UK trade of improved integration between road and rail infrastructure. [906138]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): The Government's transport investment strategy seeks to make Britain a more attractive place to trade and invest by improving the capacity and connectivity of Britain's transport infrastructure. I know that, in my right hon. Friend's own county, which has London Gateway, Tilbury and Harwich, she is a staunch campaigner for improved infrastructure and for more international trade and investment.

Priti Patel: To thrive as a global beacon for free trade, Britain has to have world-class infrastructure, so will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State work across Government to bring in road and rail upgrades, but also the introduction of free ports and enterprise zones in order to turbocharge business, trade and investment opportunities post Brexit?

Dr Fox: Well-connected transport infrastructure is key to our trading capability. When it comes to free ports, as my right hon. Friend knows, I am personally very well-disposed towards the concept. It is one area where we can take potential advantage when we have the freedom to do so once we have left the European Union.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): If he has not already done so, will the Secretary of State raise the potential merits of Scottish inclusion in the HS2 project with the Secretary of State for Transport?

Dr Fox: Increased transport infrastructure will benefit all parts of the United Kingdom, and I would be happy to take up the hon. Gentleman's case with the Transport Secretary at any time.

US Tariffs: EU Countermeasures

7. **Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the proportionality of the EU's countermeasures to US tariffs on steel and aluminium. [906143]

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): While we sympathise with US concerns regarding transparency and the overproduction of steel, we continue to argue that tariffs applied under section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act are not an appropriate solution for dealing with these issues. We will continue to seek a constructive, permanent resolution with the United States to avoid further escalation, which would only harm businesses, jobs and consumers in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Mr Sharma: After we have left the EU and turned our back on our trading partners, what steps will the Secretary of State's Department take to ensure that the UK can stand up to aggressive trade practices?

Dr Fox: Far from turning our back on any trading partners, we are seeking a full, transparent, comprehensive and liberal trading agreement with the European Union, and we will seek others. When it comes to protecting British industries, we can do that only when we have a trade remedies authority in place, and I have to remind the hon. Gentleman that he and his party voted against the Trade Bill, which establishes that authority.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State's reluctance to support EU countermeasures to combat Trump's trade war, and the Government's opposition to every amendment that we proposed to the Trade Bill and the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill, speak volumes about his Government's true intentions. When will he give the trade remedies authority the board members it will need if it is to stand up for UK businesses and consumers? And when will he put an end to the impression that the UK's Secretary of State would rather back Donald Trump's policy of America first?

Dr Fox: That question was wrong on so many issues that I do not know where to start. Rather than being against countermeasures, the United Kingdom supported the European Union—as I have done several times in this House—in saying that we believed that what the United States did was incompatible with WTO law and that we were therefore against it. And it is the height of cheek to demand that the Government should put members on a board that the Labour party tried to prevent us from establishing in the first place.

Future Trade Agreements: Parliamentary Scrutiny

8. **Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP):** If he will take steps to facilitate parliamentary scrutiny of future trade agreements. [906144]

The Minister for Trade Policy (George Hollingbery): I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that Parliament will have a critical role to play in scrutinising the UK's future trade deals. We will bring forward proposals in due course.

Gavin Newlands: The Trade Bill in its original form grants Ministers discretionary powers that undermine Parliament's right of scrutiny. There is no guarantee that agreements will be transposed as originally agreed by the EU, particularly in respect of quotas and tariffs.

Given the oft-repeated mantra of taking back control, how can the Government justify not giving Parliament a say on these arrangements?

George Hollingbery: I know that the hon. Gentleman and others have tabled amendments to the Trade Bill. The details of our proposals on scrutiny will come forward in due course. The Government are committed to building a transparent and inclusive trade policy that is balanced against the need to ensure the confidentiality of negotiations. Any proposal that the Government bring forward will be on top of those mechanisms that are already at the disposal of Parliament. We will be consulting widely with the regions, and many of the concerns that the hon. Gentleman is articulating will be discussed in the regions of England and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Work has already commenced on talking some of these issues through with the devolved authorities.

Topical Questions

T1. [906146] **Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox): My Department is responsible for foreign and outward direct investment, for establishing an independent trade policy and for export promotion. I am delighted today to announce the appointment of Natalie Black, Emma-Wade Smith and Simon Penney as our new Trade Commissioners for Asia Pacific, Africa and the middle east respectively. May I also thank my departing senior private secretary, George Thomson? We do not thank our excellent civil servants nearly enough for the job that they do.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Will the Secretary of State adopt the trade policy of Her Majesty's Opposition?

Dr Fox: Inasmuch as I am able to discern what it is, which the events of this week make extremely difficult, the answer would have to be no—not least because, in regard to trade, the Opposition Front Bench has become a caricature of a loony left party in seeming to regard Justin Trudeau as a lackey of global corporatism.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Ministers have made much today about the vote on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement earlier this week. I am not quite sure what they do not understand about no deal with Canada being better than a bad deal; I thought that in other areas that was actually their party policy.

I want to focus on the damning report on carbon emissions released today by the Committee on Climate Change. The Conservative Committee Chair, Lord Deben, set out a stark demand:

“Act now, climate change will not pause while we consider our options.”

In response, will the Secretary of State explain why, on the latest figures, 99.4% of the support that UK Export Finance gives to the energy sector goes to fossil fuels? Will he tell the House what steps he is now taking to redress that imbalance, to promote and support renewable

energy and respect the Equator Principles, which his Department signed up to, about sustainability in global trade last year?

Dr Fox: When I saw the hon. Gentleman stand up, my heart sank, given that this is only a 30-minute session.

We use UK Export Finance to promote a whole range of environmental and trading issues—in fact, I was in discussions with Equinor in Oslo last week about how we can use UK Export Finance to further the use and export of renewables.

T2. [906147] **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): Following the excellent news this week that China has lifted its 20-year ban on UK beef exports, what action are Ministers taking to ensure that British farmers can make the most of this huge trading opportunity?

Dr Fox: Like the whole House, I am sure, I am delighted that the Chinese Government have decided to lift the ban. I would like to praise my own officials in helping to do that, although it would not have been possible if the Prime Minister had not raised the issue at the highest level during her visit to China.

I will be seeing how we can take advantage of the lifting of the ban when I visit China in August for the Joint Economic and Trade Committee. I hope that in future we will be able to take delegations of UK beef producers, so that we can seek to make the most of an incredibly large potential market.

T4. [906150] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): The Government claim that they are aiming to promote British produce to the global market, post Brexit. On Sunday in Scotland, a strategy was launched to increase the value of fruit and vegetables to Scotland's economy. The picking of that produce is heavily dependent on migrant labour from Europe; we simply cannot promote or export goods that are left rotting in the fields. What assurances can the Secretary of State offer this important sector that that essential labour force will be guaranteed?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the importance of access to talent, both in agriculture and elsewhere. We aim to ensure that that continues after Brexit so that the enormous growth—of 70% in exports from Scotland since 2010—can continue, including that of the produce that he mentioned.

T3. [906148] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Grants for trade stands at overseas exhibitions offer vital support for businesses looking to trade internationally. Will the Minister update the House on what grants might be available for the 2019 exhibition season?

Dr Fox: The Department will provide an update on the grants available for trade show attendance in 2019-20 later this year in the context of our forthcoming export strategy. My hon. Friend has made an important point, but we must also ensure that the help we give is targeted to produce the best results, not the greatest number.

T5. [906151] **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): The Secretary of State has previously suggested that outward direct investment is often seen as a fig leaf for outsourcing jobs and cutting costs at the expense of domestic investment

in jobs. Does his Department monitor the number of jobs lost in the UK as a result of decisions to invest overseas? If so, will he tell us what they are?

Dr Fox: I do find it strange that people think that foreign direct investment in the United Kingdom is a good thing, but that UK investment in other countries is a bad thing. Such investment is an essential part of an open trading system. It is also an important part of our development agenda. Investing and creating jobs overseas, as we saw with Jaguar Land Rover in South Africa, for example, is often one of the ways in which we can provide help for some of the poorest countries in the world.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): One of our great exports is Scotch whisky, much of which is produced in my Moray constituency. What is the Department doing to ensure the geographical indication protection on Scotch whisky is maintained within the EU when we leave?

Dr Fox: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Government are seeking to ensure the continued GI protection of Scotch whisky in the EU after Brexit. Negotiations on geographical indications are continuing, and we anticipate that all current UK GIs will continue to be protected by the EU's geographical indications scheme after Brexit.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I call Matt Rodda. Where is the fella? Not here. Oh well, Mr Dakin is here.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What initial assessment have the Government made of the impact of steel tariffs on the UK industry? What support are the Government giving UK steel to mitigate the impact until the tariffs are removed?

Dr Fox: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and I raised this with the EU Trade Commissioner last week. We are looking to see what impact there may be from any diversion and whether we need to introduce safeguards to protect UK steel producers. The earliest time that is likely to happen will be early to mid-July, and we are already seeing some movements that may justify it. As soon as we have the evidence to be able to justify such a decision, we will take it.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I read a fantastic Ministry of Defence document the other day that showed how the global centre of economic activity has shifted over time: 30 years ago, it was in the middle of the Atlantic; today, it is somewhere over Egypt; but in 2050 it will be somewhere around Vietnam. Is it not right, therefore, that our trade negotiations should accordingly shift south and east?

Dr Fox: One of our reasons for introducing Her Majesty's Trade Commissioners is to ensure that the United Kingdom has the proper organisation to take advantage of those shifts in global trade. As I have previously said in the House, the International Monetary Fund has said that, in the next 10 to 15 years, 90% of growth in the global economy will be outside continental Europe. That is where the opportunities will be, and that is where we need to be, too.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Can the Trade Secretary tell us whether he intends to send the Trade Bill for Royal Assent, even if the Scottish Parliament withholds its consent from relevant clauses?

Dr Fox: We believe that, because the Trade Bill will give continuity to British businesses, including in Scotland, and because not passing it would be detrimental to the interests of businesses, jobs and workers in Scotland, the Scottish Government will, in the end, see sense and support the Bill.

Women and Equalities

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Women in the Science, Technology and Engineering Industries

1. **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): What steps the Government are taking with businesses to ensure that women are better represented in the science, technology and engineering industries. [906108]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): The Government are working with business to encourage more women to consider following a science, technology, engineering and maths career path. We are doing this through a range of interventions, from major communication campaigns like the Year of Engineering to specific in-school activities like STEM ambassadors.

Andrew Rosindell: Will the Minister join me in commending the Frances Bardsley Academy for Girls in Romford? Retired engineers go into the school to tutor the young girls, particularly in the STEM industries. Does she agree that that is a great way to help young people, and particularly females, into this industry?

Penny Mordaunt: I pay tribute to that specific example and to my hon. Friend, who has championed such work in his constituency. Quite often we need to inform people not just about the career possibilities but about the pleasure those careers have given people. The STEM ambassadors programme, which is a network of 30,000 volunteers from a very wide range of backgrounds and employers, is vital to getting the message across.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Oldcastle Primary School in my constituency holds a STEM week in which it involves all our local businesses in a whole range of activities with its pupils. Last week Oldcastle and Trelales Primary Schools—the right hon. Lady is the most appropriate Minister to appreciate this—attended the RAF presentation team and saw the whole range of STEM activities that are available in the armed forces. Does she agree that we also have an opportunity to highlight STEM by engaging our armed forces' presentation teams?

Penny Mordaunt: I absolutely do, and I thank the hon. Lady for mentioning this during Armed Forces Week. There are fantastic career opportunities in not only the RAF, but other services. Those armed forces are more operationally capable when we have equal numbers of men and women serving.

Period Poverty

2. **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): What progress the Government are making on ending period poverty. [906110]

7. **Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): What progress the Government are making on ending period poverty. [906119]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): No girl or woman should be held back because of her gender or background. In March, this Government announced that Brook Young People would receive a grant of £1.5 million for its project in the UK “Let’s Talk. Period”. The project will support young women and girls by educating them on how to manage their menstruation and providing free sanitary products, if required.

Grahame Morris: Is it not outrageous that in 2018 period poverty exists at all? Is it not an indictment of this Government’s policies of austerity that schools such as South Hetton Primary School in my constituency are having to improvise and provide pant packs to ensure that students from low-income families never have to miss a school day for want of proper sanitary products?

Victoria Atkins: It was always a mystery to me why the Labour Government did not seize the opportunity to reduce the VAT rate on sanitary products to 5%, as the coalition Government did. The VAT charged on women’s sanitary products is the lowest possible amount that can be charged in order to comply with EU law. Some retailers have decided to pay the 5% VAT for their customers and have reduced prices accordingly. This is a matter for business, but the Government are committed to applying a zero rate of VAT on sanitary products by the earliest date possible when we leave the EU.

Danielle Rowley: I would like to—

Mr Speaker: It is very good of the hon. Lady to drop in on us; I am sure she has a very busy schedule. As I am burbling on at her, she will be able to recover her breath, and we very much look forward to hearing her.

Danielle Rowley: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to announce to you and to the House—perhaps you will excuse my lateness—that today I am on my period, and this week it has already cost me £25. We know that the average cost of periods in the UK over a year is £500, which many women cannot afford. What is the Minister doing to address period poverty?

Victoria Atkins: As I say, we have invested £1.5 million in the Brook Young People “Let’s Talk. Period” project, supporting young women and girls on managing their menstruation and providing free products, if appropriate. The Government are committed to removing the VAT rate on sanitary products when we leave the EU. That will help with the cost of sanitary products.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): What discussions has the Minister had with ministerial colleagues at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport about bids to address period poverty through the tampon tax fund?

Victoria Atkins: The Government set up the tampon tax fund from the 5% VAT that is charged on sanitary products. The fund serves many charities, but it is particularly helping the Brook Young People project, which I welcome.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that we can reduce VAT to zero only because we are leaving the European Union? Can she quantify in millions of pounds how much that step will save women in Britain?

Victoria Atkins: On the first question, yes. On the second, I will write to my hon. Friend with the figure.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Will the Minister join me in congratulating Wings Cymru, which supports every junior, primary and secondary school in my constituency, and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), in supplying sanitary products to all girls across the county borough? Will the Minister also welcome the fact that the Welsh Government have provided direct investment in order to give free sanitary products, after campaigning groups such as Wings Cymru have been lobbying? Is it not time that the UK Government stepped in to deliver more funding for free sanitary products?

Victoria Atkins: That is an interesting project and I am interested to hear about it. On the impact of periods on girls attending school, the Department for Education has conducted an analysis of absence statistics to see whether there is any evidence of period poverty having an impact on school attendance. There is currently no significant evidence, but we very much keep it under review, which is why there will be questions about it in the Department's 2018 surveys for pupils and senior school leaders. We will of course review the project in Wales and, in fairness, the project in Scotland as well.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): The Welsh and Scottish Governments recognise that period poverty is a serious issue and have both introduced schemes to tackle it, so why are the UK Government failing to provide support to tackle this growing problem and leaving it to charities and individual groups such as Beauty Banks, a cosmetics equivalent of food banks organised by Jo Jones and Sali Hughes, to fill the gap?

Victoria Atkins: As I said, we are watching with interest the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver access to free sanitary products in schools and other educational institutions, along with the Welsh commitment. We will look at and review the outcomes of those studies and projects.

Universal Credit: Women in Abusive Relationships

3. **Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** Whether she has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the effect of the operation of universal credit on women in abusive relationships. [906111]

8. **Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP):** Whether she has had discussions with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the effect of the operation of universal credit on women in abusive relationships. [906120]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Kit Malthouse): Universal credit continues to support victims of domestic violence through a range of measures, including special conditions for temporary accommodation, conditionality easements and same-day advances. Work coaches will also signpost domestic violence victims to expert third-party support.

Peter Grant: The Women's Budget Group has confirmed what we all knew: the practice of insisting on paying universal credit into a single bank account per household makes it much easier for domestic abusers to exert financial control over their victims. What discussions has the Department had with the DWP to end the practice and make split payments the default, rather than an exceptional practice?

Kit Malthouse: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there have been several debates on split payments, not least the Westminster Hall debate last week. The Scottish Government have of course mandated—and I think legislated for—the introduction of split payments. We are going to work with them to make that happen and we will see how it goes. The issue of mandatory split payments does, though, raise much more complexity than I think the hon. Gentleman might at first realise. There are questions about what the split should be if one person is not working and the other person is, or if one person pays more of the household bills than the other. There are lots of questions about whether people who are mandated to have split payments are able to opt out of them and, if so, whether they are doing so under duress. Much more important than split payments is our ability to detect and support the victims of domestic violence on the frontline.

Gavin Newlands: Notwithstanding the Minister's answer, in addition to working with the Scottish Government, will he commit to working with my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) to support and progress her private Member's Bill, which calls for the DWP to introduce split payments to protect women against financial domestic abuse and controlling relationships?

Kit Malthouse: Not at the moment, no. We have committed to enabling the introduction of split payments in Scotland, if it does indeed proceed. Work and discussions about split payments with the Scottish Government are ongoing, and I think the full truth of the complexity and the side effects of split payments is now dawning, so we shall see whether it proceeds. If it does, we will review it. As I said, I will keep an open mind about split payments and we will see what transpires in future.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): The DWP has continued to say that split payments are available, but does the Minister agree that that may put women at risk of further abuse in relationships and may prevent them from asking for this option?

Kit Malthouse: I do not, no. We are making sure that work coaches at the frontline are able to offer and manually introduce a split payment when it is appropriate. The one thing that all of us who have been involved in work on domestic violence know is that it is critical that the victim is in control—that they have control of their

own destiny and make decisions about what is in their best interests. If a split payment is appropriate, we will provide it.

Maternity Discrimination

4. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle maternity discrimination. [906112]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): It is unlawful to discriminate against women in the workplace because they are pregnant or new mothers. We are implementing the commitment set out in our response last year to the Women and Equalities Committee report on pregnancy discrimination. In our response to the Taylor review, we have committed to considering whether the legislation protecting pregnant women and new mothers from redundancy is adequate. That review is under way and we plan to publish a consultation in the summer.

Nigel Huddleston: Susan Wojcicki is the chief executive officer of YouTube and she has been quite outspoken on this issue. She says that mothers given paid maternity leave, for example, come back to work with new skills and insights that help a company's bottom line. Does the Minister agree that supporting mothers in the workplace not only is the right thing to do, but can help and be good for business, too?

Victoria Atkins: Very much so. We have the highest rate of female employment on record. We know that we have more women returning to work after they have had caring responsibilities. The message to business is very clear: women are good for business. Organisations with the highest level of gender diversity in their leadership teams are 15% more likely to outperform their industry rivals.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): How women are treated when they become pregnant and have to take maternity leave is a disgrace in both how it affects their job promotion and how it affects them when they come back after maternity leave. Can we have more leadership and a new charter so that every woman and every employer knows their rights?

Victoria Atkins: The law is very clear: employers are not allowed to discriminate against women on the basis of pregnancy or of their maternity commitments. As part of dealing with the gender pay gap, employers are beginning to talk about how they treat their workforce in a way that they did not a year or two ago. To me, this is part of readjusting what we expect from employers and what employees expect of the people for whom they work.

Menopause Training and Information in the Workplace

5. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that training and information on the menopause is provided for managers and other employees in the workplace. [906115]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): The Government commissioned an evidence review of menopause, published last July, which highlighted the important role that employers can play in supporting women. Following that, the Women's Business Council

developed a toolkit for employers, which enables employers to make the right adaptations to physical workplace environments, support flexible working, and raise awareness to help tackle this issue. To date, social media awareness-raising activity has reached nearly 300,000 people.

Liz McInnes: I thank the Minister for that answer. The TUC and the trade unions have produced some excellent guides to menopause policies in the workplace. Does she agree that menopause policies should become statutory for employers in the same way that maternity policies are statutory?

Victoria Atkins: This is part of our changing expectations of employers. We now know that the employment rate of older women, aged 50 to 64, has risen more than any other age group since 2010. With more women over the age of 50 remaining in work, more women will experience the symptoms of menopause while at work and so it is in employers' interests to ensure that they have policies that adapt.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her response. Can she further outline how information is provided to small businesses that do not have a human resources department and are not sure how to access help or information as easily as other businesses with HR departments?

Victoria Atkins: We are conscious of the difficulties of scale in small businesses, which is why the Women's Business Council toolkit is available to employers of any size. We have also appointed the Business in the Community age at work leadership team as the business champion for older workers. We very much hope that its work will help employers and women understand their rights.

FTSE 100 Finance Chief Roles

6. **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to increase the number of women in FTSE 100 finance chief roles. [906116]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): We are supporting the Hampton-Alexander review targets for women to hold 33% of all senior leadership and board positions in the FTSE 100 by 2020. Some 29% of the FTSE 100 board positions are now held by women, which is up from 12.5% in 2011.

Mr Cunningham: I thank the Minister for that answer, but I am sure that she would agree with me that, lower down the scale, a lot more needs to be done in terms of pay equality for women. Will she also have a discussion with her colleague at the DWP regarding the 11,000 WASPI women in Coventry who were born after 1951 and who are living in poverty to a certain extent because they cannot get their pension?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I am keen to look at a broader range of women than the Government Equalities Office has perhaps previously focused on, including the category of older women. We are really trying to look at everything facing women at that point in their life, including their caring responsibilities, their financial fragility and the options they have to stay economically active.

Intimate Sexual Images: Distribution

9. **Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure the effectiveness of legislation on the distribution of intimate sexual images without permission. [906121]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): It is a pleasure that the first question that I will answer from this Dispatch Box is from my right hon. Friend, who has done so much to highlight and drive progress on these issues as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee and throughout her time as a Member of this House.

The sharing of intimate images in this manner is a terrible abuse of trust that can leave victims feeling humiliated, degraded and betrayed. That is why we created—in section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015—a new offence that criminalised the disclosure of private sexual photographs and films without the consent of an individual who appears in them, and with the intent to cause that individual distress. I am glad that people are being successfully prosecuted under this new offence, which carries a maximum sentence of two years behind bars, although there is always more that can be done.

Mrs Miller: I welcome my hon. Friend to his new position in the first of what I am sure will be very many opportunities to answer questions at the Dispatch Box.

When this Government made it a crime to post intimate sexual images online without consent, the then Minister said that the matter would be kept under review, particularly the calls from across the House to make it a sex offence so that victims could have anonymity. We now know that one in three victims will not take forward cases because of concerns about the impact on their lives, so will the Minister, in his new position, take another look at the issue and see whether we can do more to ensure that online sex-related crimes have the same standing as those committed offline?

Edward Argar: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight these issues. A range of factors can cause victims not to support charges; these include the legal and court process, the length of time the process takes and aspects such as anonymity, which my right hon. Friend mentioned. Although charging is a matter for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service, and we have no immediate plans to review the rules around anonymity, we are committed to supporting all victims of crime and to improving processes where possible. We remain committed to bringing forward a victims strategy this summer, in which we will look at these factors and broader issues.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): Before I ask my question, may I just correct the record? It was, in fact, a Labour Government who reduced the tax on menstruation products in 2001 to the lowest allowed, which was 5%.

I concur with the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and welcome the Minister to his new position. As we have heard, one in three cases is dropped, so would it not be better for victims and society if we made image-based sex crimes—commonly known as

revenge porn—a sexual offence, so that victims can be given anonymity, just as victims will be given anonymity under provisions of the upskirting Bill?

Edward Argar: I am grateful for the shadow Minister's kind words. I look forward to exchanging pleasant words with her across the Dispatch Box on many future occasions. She is right to highlight the importance of the issue. As I have said, we are committed to supporting and protecting victims. The opportunity currently exists for any victim—and, similarly, for witnesses—to apply for reporting restrictions to help them give evidence. Although we are not at this stage committing to review the rules around anonymity, we do of course continue to look at this matter. All factors will be considered as we move forward with this important legislation.

Topical Questions

T1. [906123] **Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): Everyone should be able to live with dignity and respect, whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity. Forty-seven years ago this week, the first LGBT Pride marches came to London. Those marches are as relevant today as they were then. Pride matters. As we prepare for our soon-to-be published LGBT action plan, Pride events are happening around the country, with Pride in London taking place next week. I would like to thank all those involved in organising the UK's Pride events this year. I look forward to taking part in some of them myself and ask all Members on both sides of the House to support them.

Danielle Rowley: When a construction company in my constituency recently went bust, the construction workers, who are predominantly men, found support and mainly found re-employment, but the administration staff—predominantly women—did not. What are the Government doing to ensure that women are not disproportionately affected by closures?

Penny Mordaunt: The DWP takes such matters very seriously and will often put in a bespoke plan, particularly if there are a large number of redundancies in one location. A lot of work has been going on in the DWP to ensure that that happens across all sectors. I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), has heard the hon. Lady's question and will take that back to the Department.

T2. [906124] **Mrs Kemi Badenoch** (Saffron Walden) (Con): Does the Minister agree that making upskirting a specific criminal offence, punishable by up to two years' imprisonment, and closing this legal loophole will better protect victims and increase convictions?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): I am grateful for my hon. Friend's question. Although there have been successful prosecutions for this highly intrusive practice under existing offences, current legislation does not necessarily cover all instances of upskirting. By creating a specific upskirting offence, the Government are strengthening the law in this area.

We are doing exactly what she alludes to—closing a loophole—and ensuring that the most serious sexual offenders go on the sex offenders register. We are determined to continue to work across the House and with Gina Martin and other campaigners to get this important law on the statute book.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): Talking about working across the House, the Women and Equalities Committee's recent report on the race disparity audit notes:

“The ability to disaggregate is essential for understanding the roles that geography, age, gender, social class and poverty play in creating poorer outcomes for some people than for others.”

The socioeconomic duty would ensure that authorities gather that data and adopt policies to tackle inequalities. Will the Government enact section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 to address the conclusions and recommendations of the race disparity audit and the Women and Equalities Committee?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. She is absolutely right; we cannot address equalities issues in silos. Much of the work that I have been doing in this new role has been looking at how we get all areas dealing with equalities across Government to become more than the sum of their parts. I am looking at the specific issue that she raises. We are also in discussion with political parties with regard to their obligations on reporting data and raising good practice across all sectors.

T3. [906126] **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): Given that it is illegal in the United Kingdom to select an embryo during IVF on the basis of gender, apart from those affected by rare genetic conditions, what plans do the Government have to make sex-selective abortions illegal in the UK?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): I thank my hon. Friend for her question, because it gives me the opportunity to say that sex selection is not one of the lawful grounds for termination of a pregnancy. Indeed, it is illegal for a practitioner to carry out an abortion for that reason alone. The only circumstances in which sex-selective abortions would be permitted are where there is a gender-linked inherited medical condition.

T4. [906127] **Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): What is the Minister doing to ensure that grants for the more than 100 disabled workers at the Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries in my constituency are protected?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Kit Malthouse): I have to confess that I am not across the detail of that particular case, but if the hon. Gentleman would like to meet me to discuss it, I would be more than happy to do so.

T6. [906130] **Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I have had a number of pieces of correspondence from constituents who are concerned that the Government need to move their plans forward on upskirting. Can the Minister confirm that we will bring upskirting offences into line with other sexual offences?

Edward Argar: We are applying a very similar approach to this to voyeurism, which carries a substantial two-year maximum custodial sentence, in order to reflect fully the seriousness of the crime. In addition, we are ensuring that the most serious sexual offenders can be placed on the sex offenders register, to help safeguard society, using the same bar as in our current law on voyeurism. The Bill is focused and clear, and I very much look forward to it continuing to receive cross-party support so that it can progress rapidly.

T5. [906129] **Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm whether the Government will commit further funding to the revenge porn helpline, which received over 6,000 calls between 2015 and 2017?

Edward Argar: I am grateful for the question from the right hon. Lady, who I know has long taken a close interest in these matters. The revenge porn helpline does great work, and within the context of the broader debate we are having at the moment, we will continue to look at it very carefully.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, when publishing the LGBT action plan, the Government will also publish as much as possible of the survey data on which it is based?

Penny Mordaunt: We will certainly do that. We will publish the action plan, the survey results—the results of the largest survey of its kind ever undertaken in the world—and the Gender Recognition Act 2004 consultation. The survey results are important and they give us a good base to work from, but they are also sad reading and absolute evidence that we need to redouble our efforts to ensure that the LGBT+ community can thrive in the UK.

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): On Tuesday, I attended the launch of the Coventry women's partnership, which is a brilliant three-year, city-wide programme aiming to improve economic outcomes for women by providing access to skills, training, confidence building and support into employment. Does the Minister agree that this type of holistic programme of support is necessary if we are to empower women and achieve a more gender-equal future?

Kit Malthouse: I completely agree. It sounds like a wonderful initiative and event. I certainly hope that our locally based work coaches were involved in that event so that they could give the extensive assistance that we are now able to provide to all those seeking work.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Taking your sage advice to persist, Mr Speaker, may I ask my right hon. Friend when she will respond to the long-awaited consultation on removing caste from the Equality Act 2010?

Penny Mordaunt: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his persistence. I will do that shortly; I know that many Members of this House want that to be done. Since the last Women and Equalities questions, I have met the Dalit community—the meeting was organised by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green)—and I am considering their particular concerns. I hope to make an announcement on this in the coming weeks.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Just this morning, the Government have published their report on the first year of the two-child restriction policy and rape clause in relation to child tax credits. As we predicted, the impact on women has been devastating: 3,000 families have been denied support and 190 women have had to declare the fact that they are survivors of rape in order to obtain support. How can this Government continue to defend this abhorrent and disgusting policy, and will they finally review it?

Kit Malthouse: As I have said in the past, we keep all our policies under constant review. I would say to the hon. Gentleman that one of the fundamental tenets of welfare reform is that the world of welfare should reflect the world of work and that people on welfare should have to take the same decisions as those who are in work, and that includes making decisions about the number of children they may or may not have. It is worth explaining that there are no current losers from the policy, but only people in contemplation.

On the particular issue of those who have children and what the hon. Gentleman calls the rape clause, we are trying to be as sensitive as we possibly can. I have made the offer to his SNP colleague, the hon. Member

for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), to meet her if she has ideas about a better way to handle it. At the moment, no one needs to make a specific declaration; we can signpost people to, and assist them in getting, the support they need in those circumstances. We are obviously very keen to hear from third-party organisations working with women subject to that appalling situation to make sure they get the support they need.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Just a few days ago, the Government helped to lead the way by supporting proposals from the International Labour Organisation to agree a convention outlawing sexual harassment at work around the world. Will my hon. Friend urge colleagues to include support for this convention in their trade talks, which I know are top of the Government's agenda?

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): As my right hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women and Equalities and I take a great interest in this subject, and we will be encouraging all Departments to have that principle in mind, not just in international trade agreements, but in every policy that can be so affected.

Nuclear Sector Deal

10.40 am

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy if he will make a statement on the nuclear sector deal.

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Mr Sam Gyimah): The Business Secretary is currently in north Wales, in Trawsfynydd, launching the nuclear sector deal, which is why I am here in his place.

The industrial strategy sets out how long-term partnerships between the Government and industry can create significant opportunities to boost productivity, employment, innovation and skills. We committed to agreeing sector deals with industries that put forward ambitious proposals to boost productivity and earning power in their sector. The Government are today launching the nuclear sector deal, the fifth in a series of deals, as part of their industrial strategy. I would like to take this opportunity to praise the long-standing support and work of the hon. Gentleman's predecessor, Lord Hutton of Furness, who has helped to facilitate the deal today from the industry side.

The nuclear sector in the UK is an economic powerhouse, equivalent in scale to the aerospace industry. It provides highly skilled, long-term employment for 87,500 people and is a driver of regional growth. Nuclear generation provides more than 20% of the UK's electricity supply, and its low-carbon, reliable baseload power complements the growing renewable portfolio that is enabling the UK to reduce CO₂ emissions in line with our commitments. The nuclear sector deal announces a package of measures to support the sector as we develop low-carbon nuclear power and continue to clean up our nuclear legacy.

The deal is about the Government and industry working in partnership to drive competitiveness across the nuclear sector. We will use these initial actions as a platform for future collaboration and investment in the sector. The Government have notified Parliament of today's deal by means of a written ministerial statement and deposited a copy of the sector deal in the Libraries of both Houses. This is a good day for the nuclear industry and for Wales, where we are focusing on small modular reactors that can help Wales become a world leader in this sector.

John Woodcock: I thank the Minister for reading studiously from the brief presented to him, but why on earth did the Business Secretary, or indeed the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, not see fit either to come to Parliament or to make themselves available to answer questions on this important issue, but instead issue a press release last night and allow us as Members of Parliament to read about it?

The deal is indeed welcome, and I join the Minister in praising my predecessor, Lord Hutton, for the work that he did when in this Chamber and which he now does in his role in the civil nuclear industry in pushing the Government along on this. Can the Minister say more about small modular reactors? How many do the Government expect there to be within the next 10 years? How will the Government ensure that British firms and British research and development, and not simply foreign direct investment, benefit? Can he guarantee that this

will supplement the larger civil nuclear build, rather than replace it? Planning for the long term, as this strategy seeks to do, is important and right, but as I hope he knows, the industry faces potential crisis now. What is happening on Euratom? Can he guarantee that standards will be maintained absolutely and that there will be sufficient people to deliver them as we approach the cliff edge?

What is the Government's position on direct investment? Will the Government now pledge to invest directly in Moorside, as they are planning to do in Wylfa? More than 20,000 jobs are at stake in south Cumbria unless the Government act on that.

Talk of supporting nuclear clusters is all very well, but will the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy intervene directly with the Department for Transport in Cumbria and stop the wonderful, world-class nuclear cluster that we could have there being inhibited by the fact that we have to drive through a farmyard to get from civil nuclear in the west to the nuclear submarine building programme in the south, in my constituency?

Mr Gyimah: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, but a written ministerial statement is being laid before Parliament today, and I reiterate that the Secretary of State and the Energy Minister are in Wales, launching the nuclear sector deal as we speak. Given the hon. Gentleman's long-standing, diligent campaign in this area, I am happy to offer him a meeting with the Secretary of State and officials as soon as possible, to go through all the elements of the deal and especially its impact on his constituency.

The hon. Gentleman asked how many small modular reactors there would be. The honest answer is that the number is not set at the moment. The Government are recognising the potential for such reactors and investing in research and development.

On direct investment and whether we will pledge to do the same for Moorside as for Wylfa, I understand the hon. Gentleman's particular interest. Our priority is to build the infrastructure that the country needs in a way that delivers value for money for taxpayers. On 4 June the Secretary of State made a statement to Parliament, announcing direct Government investment in the Wylfa Newydd project. For future projects we are looking at the viability of a regulated asset model, as we have done before.

Safety and security is obviously a top priority and we will work with the sector and regulators to ensure that our staff are in place, but I reiterate the offer of a meeting as soon as possible, at which the hon. Gentleman may discuss all the details with officials and Ministers.

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): This is a brilliant day and I am delighted that the Government are demonstrating their recognition of our nuclear sector. I was particularly pleased to see the reference to 40% more females working in the industry by 2030, and I hope the Minister will join me in acknowledging the work that the women in nuclear do, but also the barriers, because often, nuclear licensed sites are in coastal, rural locations where affordable, flexible, high-quality childcare is simply not available at the moment. I hope he will work with me in improving that in my constituency. The Minister talks of the 87,500 workers in the nuclear industry. In Cumbria, we have 27,000 of those; we are absolutely the centre of nuclear excellence.

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend, who has campaigned assiduously on this issue since she joined the House, makes a very good point around the commitment to increase the number of women working in the sector. That is a significant commitment, and one that we are determined to deliver on.

More generally, for Cumbria, a major component of the deal is support for lower-cost decommissioning using advanced manufacturing techniques, so Cumbria is set to benefit, as it is from Sellafield which, as my hon. Friend said, employs several thousand people and leads on some of the most complex decommissioning challenges.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I welcome the publication, albeit delayed, of a nuclear sector deal, but the Secretary of State really should be here to announce the deal, not least so that we can get some answers to the questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), which we did not in the Minister's previous response. Nuclear energy plays an important part in reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and in delivering jobs and prosperity to the parts of the country that most need investment, not least my hon. Friend's constituency. We very much welcome the 40% target of women working in the civil nuclear sector by 2030, but when is it going to be 50%?

This announcement is mostly a repackaging of existing policy. Of the headline £200 million, it seems that only £10 million is new Government funding, so will the Minister confirm the £56 million for R&D for advanced modular reactors and the £86 million for a national fusion technology platform, both announced last December, and the £32 million for an advanced manufacturing and construction programme, which was unveiled last month? Will he also confirm why there has been a considerable downgrade in the funding available for small modular reactors? In 2015, the then Chancellor said that £250 million would be allocated to small nuclear reactors. At the end of 2017, the Department said that £100 million would be allocated, and now it is just £56 million.

The Minister mentioned Wales, so will he take the opportunity to clarify the Government's funding arrangements for the Wylfa plant in Anglesey? In the week when the Government have scrapped the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon, it has become clear that different rules apply for different technologies. This announcement should have been made alongside a commitment to invest in tidal energy. Both are equally important. The Committee on Climate Change says today that the Government are failing to keep up with agreed targets on decarbonisation. With this week's announcement to scrap the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon, the expansion of airport capacity and the modesty of the nuclear sector deal, will he tell us how the Government are going to meet their climate change obligations?

Mr Gyimah: On the question of there being no new money here, that is not correct. The deal announced today has £20 million for advanced manufacturing, £10 million for supply chain support, £40 million for potential hydraulics facilities in north Wales and £32 million of industry money, and potentially more to come. That is new money. On the much broader question of tidal energy versus nuclear, to reiterate the arguments that have been made in the House already this week, the Swansea bay proposal would cost £1.3 billion to build

but would have produced only 0.15% of the electricity we use each year—a capital cost that is more than three times as much per unit of electricity as Hinkley Point C. The same power generated by Swansea over 60 years would cost only £400 million for offshore wind, even at today's prices. There are some people you can never please, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) said, today is a good story for the nuclear industry, and I hope that Opposition Members join us in welcoming it.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I welcome today's sector deal and particularly the role for small modular reactors, which are an obvious replacement for decommissioned coal-fired power stations. Will the Minister confirm that today's announcement means that nuclear remains a key part of our energy mix, providing a diverse energy source as part of this Government's industrial strategy?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend is right: nuclear is a key part of the energy mix and we are looking for low-cost, reliable and stable sources of energy. That is why our industrial strategy is focusing today on a nuclear energy deal to deliver precisely that.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): With Mark Carney saying that Brexit has cost each household £900, this Government's support for costly nuclear energy is a further blow to household budgets. The deal coincides with the proposed nuclear power station at Wylfa in Anglesey in north Wales with a trailed strike price of around £80 per megawatt-hour, brought down from Hinkley's £92.5 per megawatt-hour through UK Government support with capital costs. This is still significantly more than wind, which comes in at around £57.5 per megawatt-hour, even including intermittency costs. Having failed the North sea in its time of need and abandoned cost-effective carbon capture and renewables technology, why do the UK Government persist with an energy policy that continues to fail Scottish industry while hiking cost for consumers?

Mr Gyimah: We have become accustomed in this House to Scottish National party MPs doing one thing north of the border and saying a different thing south of the border. The former Member for Gordon, when he was First Minister, backed the life extension of the nuclear plants in Scotland, so I am surprised that faced with this deal they are not welcoming the jobs in the supply chain from which Scotland will benefit. Yes, we are focused on nuclear, but as part of a balanced approach to ensure that we have the energy sources we need for the future.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): This announcement is very welcome indeed, particularly in relation to the under-representation of women in the nuclear industry. Has there been any scoping as to the positive impact on emissions of this new investment?

Mr Gyimah: My hon. Friend is right to point out the commitment to women. Currently, the percentage of women in the sector is 22%. We believe that is far too low. Forty per cent. is an ambition we intend to meet and build on, although that does not seem to be enough for the Opposition. The impact on emissions has been considered. I draw the attention of Members to the nuclear deal, which is in the House of Commons Library.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I welcome the launch of the nuclear sector deal, which is being held this morning in Trawsfynydd power station in my constituency. I congratulate local people and trade unions, and especially Prospect rep Rory Trappe of Blaenau Ffestiniog, for working to safeguard the tradition of innovative and safe energy production in the heart of Welsh-speaking Meirionnydd. The people of Wales seek to be equipped with the means to overcome poverty. Today's announcement is a step in the right direction that will strengthen our capacity to generate and to profit from exporting energy, offering once again the prospect of well-paid technology jobs in a region that presently suffers some of the lowest wages in the UK. I call on the Minister to do all he can to work with the Welsh Government, Cyngor Gwynedd, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and higher education to develop Trawsfynydd to its full economic potential, and I specifically call for final site clearance of the two decommissioned reactors to enable that.

Mr Speaker: I will assume the insertion of a question mark.

Mr Gyimah: I welcome the extended question from the hon. Lady. She is absolutely right to say that small modular reactors in Wales could position Wales as a world leader. It is encouraging to see Ministers from Westminster at the launch today. They are working closely in partnership with Welsh Government officials. I believe that that is how we are going to make this a success. On the broader question, we will do everything possible to make this work for Wales.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I too welcome today's announcement. Will the Minister do whatever he can to back the new industrial research and development advanced manufacturing research centre site planned for Derby's Infinity Park, located alongside the global headquarters for Rolls-Royce, which already leads the way in small modular reactors?

Mr Gyimah: Part of the way to achieve success in this area, and indeed in most other areas of science, is to have clusters around the country. Part of the industrial strategy is to ensure that where such clusters exist, support is available for them to be successful, as with the one in Derby that my hon. Friend mentions.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) on once again assiduously doing his job as a constituency Member. He asked a question of the Minister which was not answered: what is going to happen with regard to Euratom, particularly if we crash out with no deal? Can the Minister assure us that we will continue to be in Euratom through the transition period and after any agreement?

Mr Gyimah: The Prime Minister has made it clear that, as part of our negotiations with the EU, we want to associate with Euratom research and training, as well as the new science and research programme, Horizon Europe. We are working on that and look to be a full partner with the EU, paying our share of the costs. Obviously, as part of the implementation period we will continue to be a part of it. The rest is subject to negotiations, but we have made it very clear to the European Union that we want to continue to associate.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): What will the impact be of the measures associated with this deal on the cost of new nuclear power stations and on decommissioning former nuclear sites?

Mr Gyimah: That is a very good question. The deal should reduce the cost of decommissioning—while, obviously, maintaining the highest safety standards—but it will also bring us up to date with modern methods.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): The costs of all renewable technologies, including wind and solar, have fallen faster than almost anyone predicted, and they now represent much better-value low-carbon energy. However, the Government cut investment in renewables by more than 50% in 2017, and just this week they rejected proposals for the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. Is this additional investment in nuclear further evidence that the Government are turning their back on renewables?

Mr Gyimah: On the contrary. Since 1990, the UK has cut emissions by 43%, while our economy has grown by more than two thirds. We have reduced emissions faster than any other G7 nation, while leading the G7 countries in growth in national income per person. We are actually increasing our economic growth, while at the same time ensuring that we are doing what we need to do for the environment by promoting clean growth.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Given the good news that the Minister has announced, I am surprised that it took an urgent question from the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) to secure a Government response.

Will my hon. Friend update us on what will be done to enable small modular reactors to be spread across the United Kingdom, so that we can cease to rely on fossil fuels?

Mr Gyimah: The Government do not intend to hide their light under a bushel in terms of the good news. My hon. Friend can find the paper on the sector deal in the House of Commons Library. As for the promotion of small modular reactors across the UK, it is part of our industrial strategy, but the nuclear sector deal and our work with the industry will help in a specific way.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The Minister said that the Government's priority was to build the infrastructure that the country needs, but, with barely a mention of climate change, his announcement must seem like hollow words to the people of south Wales and the west of England, coming as it does in the same week as the decision not to support the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. When will the Government recognise the huge untapped potential of tidal energy, and get serious about climate change?

Mr Gyimah: I have already made it very clear that the Government have succeeded in cutting our emissions while increasing growth. The nuclear sector deal is part of our ambition for cleaner growth in this country. I know that Opposition Members do not agree with the decision on the tidal lagoon, but it is clear that the same power generation over 60 years with offshore wind would cost only £400 million, even at today's prices. Sometimes it is necessary to look at the hard facts and make decisions based on those.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Given the role that the nuclear industry plays in providing highly paid and highly skilled jobs throughout the south-west, including south Devon, this announcement is very welcome, but how does the Minister envisage the benefits of the sector deal being spread across the United Kingdom, and particularly into the south-west of England?

Mr Gyimah: I expect the benefits to be spread across the country. There will be up to £2 billion-worth of domestic and international contract wins, which will help the supply chain of the nuclear industry throughout the country.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) on securing the urgent question.

Renewables are also an important part of our energy mix, and in east Yorkshire, particularly with offshore wind, we are leading the world in that development. When might we see a sector deal for renewables, and can the Minister tell us when we will be given more details about the sector deals for local areas which the Government announced, I think, last year?

Mr Gyimah: As part of our industrial strategy, we committed ourselves to a series of sector deals. So far, five have been announced, including the life sciences deal, the automotive sector deal, the artificial intelligence deal, and the nuclear sector deal announced today. We are looking for opportunities across the board, and if there is an opportunity for us to develop a sector deal working with industry, we are willing to proceed. As the hon. Lady knows, clean growth is one of the four grand challenges in the industrial strategy, and we will make sure that we do everything we need to do to make a success of it.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The Minister has confirmed that the new nuclear sector deal plans to reduce the costs both of new-build nuclear projects and of decommissioning old nuclear sites. By how much and by when?

Mr Gyimah: We can always on my hon. Friend for a very precise question. We expect, by 2030, a 30% reduction in the cost of new-build projects. We also want, by 2030, to improve diversity across the sector by achieving 40% female participation, as I mentioned. Again by 2030, we expect to achieve savings of 20% in the cost of decommissioning.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Minister aware that I spent seven happy years as a councillor in Lliw Valley near Swansea in south Wales? I am therefore very disappointed that this morning's announcement, which I welcome, could not have been combined with the right decision this week on the Swansea Bay barrage scheme. While I am in favour of small nuclear energy initiatives and hope they will spread, is there not still a question mark over what we do with nuclear waste? We still have not resolved that, and it is still a real problem and a real challenge for our society. Will he give an assurance that we will have an answer?

Mr Speaker: I had not been aware of the hon. Gentleman's distinguished career in local government, but I am now.

Mr Gyimah: Nor had I been aware of the hon. Gentleman's distinguished career, Mr Speaker—you learn something new every day in this House.

I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that safety is absolutely paramount in the plans that the Government have. On the tidal lagoon, the proposed programme would have cost the average household consumer up to £700 between 2031 and 2050. Each week in this House, there is a question about what we are doing to bring down the cost of energy. We are not against tidal lagoons, but we cannot support every project at any price, and that is why we made the decision that we did.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): This is a good nuclear sector deal, but are tidal lagoons totally off the agenda now?

Mr Gyimah: As I said, we are not against tidal lagoons, but they must demonstrate value for money for consumers and public funds.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): The electronic infrastructure summit held this week in London urged the need for independent cyber-security audits across critical national infrastructure, particularly in the energy sector. Does the Minister agree that nuclear is one sector where we urgently need to ensure that cyber-security keeps us free from attacks and black sky events?

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Lady identifies a risk to this critical infrastructure. I can assure her that we take all the steps necessary to make sure that it is protected, and cyber-security is one of those.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): In Scotland, the nuclear energy sector is worth £1 billion a year, employs 12,000 people, and generates 35% of the nation's electricity in a stable and consistent way. Scotland's four advanced gas-cooled reactors are due to be decommissioned and taken offline by 2030. Has the Minister had any discussions with his Scottish ministerial counterparts on the huge industrial opportunity that this presents for Scotland at Hunterston and Torness after 2030?

Mr Gyimah: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has recognised that there is a huge opportunity for Scotland in this deal, given how much Scotland participates in the supply chain. As we are doing with the devolved Government in Wales, we will be working with all the devolved Administrations, where this is relevant to them, to make a success of this deal.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his statement. Does he agree that an essential component of this deal is the research and development component to make the use of nuclear power safer and more effective, and to better harness the ability of the UK to produce our own energy as opposed to relying on middle eastern fuel?

Mr Gyimah: The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the R and D component as critical to success in this field. In the industrial strategy we have committed to increase the R and D spend from the current 1.7% to 2.4% of GDP by 2027. This will be a mixture of public and private investment, and by achieving this huge commitment—£80 billion over the next decade—we will be able to do the sorts of things we need to do here in nuclear to make sure we have a secure source of energy.

Business of the House

11.9 am

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

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

MONDAY 2 JULY—Estimates day (3rd allotted day). There will be a debate on estimates relating to the Ministry of Justice, Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

TUESDAY 3 JULY—Estimates day (4th allotted day). There will be a debate on estimates relating to the Department for Education and Her Majesty's Treasury that relate to grants to the devolved institutions.

At 7 pm, the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates, followed by a motion relating to the appointment of trustees to the House Of Commons Members Fund.

WEDNESDAY 4 JULY—Proceedings on the Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) Bill, followed by remaining stages of the Ivory Bill, followed by Opposition day (allotted half day). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Scottish National party, subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 5 JULY—General debate on the principle of proxy voting, followed by a debate on a motion on the future of the transforming care programme. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 6 JULY—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 9 July will include:

MONDAY 9 JULY—Consideration of a business of the House motion, followed by proceedings on the Northern Ireland Budget (No.2) Bill.

Alongside the news that the EU withdrawal Bill received Royal Assent, there are a couple of other things to celebrate in Parliament this week. First, the House of Commons Library reaches the ripe old age of 200; that is 200 years the House has benefited from this crucial service and for that we are very grateful. Secondly, the Voice & Vote exhibition has launched in Westminster Hall and is open right through to October. Visitors can see just how far women in politics have come since they were hidden behind the brass grilles above this very Chamber. In this Vote 100 year, it is bound to be a hugely popular event. I hope many will come to Westminster to relive those achievements. Finally, it is National Democracy Week next week. There is a huge programme of events taking place right across Whitehall and I look forward to being a part of it.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. I echo very much what the Leader of the House has just said about the magnificent and celebratory exhibition in Westminster Hall, and in echoing that I urge people attending our proceedings today if they have a little spare time and have not already viewed the exhibition to do so. An enormous amount of specialist loving care and preparation have gone into it and, like the Leader of the House, I am very proud of the exhibition. I joined the Lords Speaker and

[Mr Speaker]

the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee on Tuesday evening formally to open it, and it is well worth seeing.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business; we are back to a week and a day.

When the Leader of the House tables a change in Standing Orders, will she give the Opposition sight of the motion? We did not have that when there was a change from three to five days in the estimates motion. There was no prior discussion through the Whips Office or the usual channels. Can she let us know the reasons behind the change?

May I also pick up on what the Leader of the House said about me a couple of weeks ago? She said I was not “fulfilling the democratic will of the people of Walsall.”—[*Official Report*, 14 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 1102.]

My constituency may have voted to leave, but one ward voted to remain and my job—and the job of all Members—is to balance the 48% and the 52%. Our duty is to act in the best interests of all our constituents and the whole of the UK. We have to hear the evidence on the impact. Perhaps she will rephrase that and wait for the Electoral Commission report on the leave campaign during the referendum. I am sure she will find time to debate that report in Government time and, in the meantime, join me in congratulating the excellent journalist Carole Cadwalladr in winning the George Orwell prize for her investigative work with the whistleblower Christopher Wylie, which resulted in an apology from Facebook and the collapse of Cambridge Analytica because they misused personal data.

Saturday is the International Day of Parliamentarism—I think that is how it is pronounced—a new day that was agreed by the United Nations, which adopted a resolution on the interaction between the UN, national Parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Of course, this Government voted down the fact that Parliament is sovereign last week. They do not want to give Parliament a final say. The Leader of the House will know that that had nothing to do with the negotiations; all that Parliament wanted was to be sovereign and to have a final say on the terms of the deal.

We need that final say because the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union first told us that there were no sectoral analyses, then, after pressure from the Opposition, he published them. He then said that there was no preliminary analysis on our exiting EU; then he published it. Now he says that there is a White Paper, but it is apparently written in invisible ink. We need to know when it will be published. Will the Leader of the House tell us when that will happen? Will she also tell us whether the Trade Bill and the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill will return before the recess? They seem to be stuck in a legislative logjam, and we do not appear to have anything to do after 9 July. Will she table the next stages of those Bills?

How do we mark Armed Forces Day on Saturday? The Opposition Labour party has called for proper investment in our armed forces so that the UK can retain its rightful place as a tier 1 military nation, and I am pleased to see that the Defence Secretary has now

joined us in making that call. Will the Leader of the House tell us when the Government will make time for a statement on restoring our armed forces to a tier 1 military nation?

It was Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Day yesterday. We have heard what the Foreign Secretary thinks of business, and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care joined in last Sunday. The Tory leader in Wales has had to resign over his anti-business comments. Business leaders have rightly raised their concerns, in a measured way, about what they are going to do to plan for their workforce and for their companies. And, as if to underline the Government’s anti-business credentials, they have now turned off the switch on the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. This seems to be an anti-business, anti-innovative Government.

The Leader of the House has announced an estimates day on the NHS. When can we have a debate on Torbay—another council that is about to collapse? It was a pioneer in integrated care. As a member of the Health Committee, I visited Torbay, where I saw an integrated service that tracked “Mrs Smith” from the start of the process in social care, through the NHS and back out again. They told us that, when the Health and Social Care Bill became an Act, they would not be able to pool the budgets. When we went to Denmark, they wanted to look at our system. They looked at Torbay and reminded us about “Mrs Smith”.

The Government seem to be too busy fighting among themselves to fight for this country. We have the Defence Secretary at loggerheads with the Chancellor, who has had to concede to the Health Secretary, promising money that the Chancellor said he did not have. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has said that the Environment Secretary is talking nonsense, and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has apparently pulled a white rabbit out of a hat, rather than a White Paper. The Leader of the House has also joined in, saying that the Environment Secretary and the Trade Secretary are tearing to shreds the Prime Minister’s preferred option for the customs partnership. There’s loyalty for you.

I want to join the Leader of the House in talking about some positive aspects. My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) is having a discussion on the political life of Nye Bevan. He will be speaking on the NHS in the Macmillan Room on Wednesday and, with your kind permission, Mr Speaker, hosting a reception in Speaker’s House. I also want to celebrate 200 years of the Library, which is absolutely fantastic. Again thanks to you, Mr Speaker, there will be a reception in Speaker’s House. I want to join you and the Leader of the House in thanking Melanie Unwin and Mari Takayanagi, who have taken four years to curate the Voice & Vote exhibition in Westminster Hall. I, too, encourage all Members and their constituents to visit that fantastic exhibition.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady has asked about estimates day debates. I am sure she is aware that estimates are laid annually rather than sessionally. This means that the Government must request supply from the House twice a year. The motion tabled by the Government and agreed by the House on Tuesday made provision for next week’s debates to take place in line with the recommendations of the Liaison Committee and the Procedure Committee, and in accordance with

Monday's resolution of the House about the subject of the debates. She claimed not to know any of that, but I am sure that, if she were to ask, she would find that those are the clear conventions of the House.

The hon. Lady asked about the legislative programme and claims that no progress is being made. I say to her again, as I often do, that 36 important Bills have been introduced so far this Session; that is absolutely in line with other parliamentary Sessions. Nineteen Bills have been sent for Royal Assent already, hundreds of statutory instruments have been passed by each House, and seven draft Bills have been published.

The hon. Lady likes to imply that important business is not going on, yet just yesterday we had the Second Reading of the Offensive Weapons Bill, which seeks to make it harder for young people to buy knives and acid online and seeks to ban possession of such awful things as zombie knives, knuckle dusters and "death stars". Those are incredibly important domestic pieces of legislation that really matter to the country, if not the Opposition. Our energy price caps Bill is on track; the Tenant Fees Bill will make renting easier and fairer; the Ivory Bill will introduce the toughest ban in the world; and our Data Protection Act is already making sure that the UK maintains our gold standard in data protection. It is extraordinary that the hon. Lady does not seem to be aware of this important legislation.

The hon. Lady says that the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill is an affront to Parliament; I do not think that of a Bill on which more than 280 hours of debate took place, to which there were more than 1,400 amendments and to which both Houses have contributed significant changes, or of a Bill that will give certainty for citizens and businesses in this country as we leave the EU in March 2019. That is what the people of this country, including in Walsall—the hon. Lady's part of the country—voted for: a democratic vote of the majority of the people. All Members across the House should welcome that.

It is a great shame that Opposition Members are all over the place—some in the Aye Lobby, some in the No Lobby, some sitting on their hands and some just disappearing from this place altogether. I found it extraordinary that the Opposition chose to vote against programme motions earlier this week, but then disappeared; having lost the programme motion, they had nothing further to say on the subject. It is absolutely astonishing—not on the part of the Government, but on the part of the Opposition. They do not know what they are doing.

The hon. Lady talked about the armed forces, and I absolutely pay tribute to their amazing work at this important time. But again, I gently point out that it is the Government side of the House that has enshrined the armed forces covenant in law; has provided nearly £500 million from LIBOR bank fines to support armed forces charities and other good causes; has provided £200 million for the Forces Help to Buy; has allowed £68 million on upgrading service family accommodation; and is providing far more support for veterans than ever before. The armed forces do a fantastic job and we will continue to support them. We will continue to have a £37 billion defence budget and to be the second biggest defence spender in NATO. That is incredibly important for the security and safety of people in this country.

The hon. Lady asks about business and Brexit. She likes to suggest, as Opposition Members have, that

not much consultation is going on. I can tell her that Department for Exiting the European Union Ministers alone have undertaken more than 500 recorded engagements with businesses since July 2016. The Secretaries of State for DExEU and for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, along with the Chancellor, have an EU exit business advisory group, involving the directors general of the CBI, the Institute of Directors, the EEF, the British Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses. We have hosted many CEOs from a range of businesses across the economy at events at Chevening House.

It is this Government who are listening to the needs of businesses; that is why we have negotiated for an implementation period, which was welcomed by those businesses. That is absolutely vital. It is a great shame that Opposition Members cannot seem to decide what they support. They are certainly not supporting a successful Brexit for the United Kingdom in March 2019. Fortunately, it is this Government and our Prime Minister who are determined to achieve a Brexit that will work for all parts of the United Kingdom.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on noise pollution? You and your deputies, Mr Speaker, do an admirable job in dealing with noise in this Chamber, but the same cannot be said about Southend West at the moment. I am receiving increasing complaints from local residents about noise from various venues, not to mention the thorny problem of aircraft noise.

Andrea Leadsom: As ever, my hon. Friend raises an interesting point, and one that is of great importance not only to his constituents but to many across the country. The Government are committed to making sure that noise is managed effectively in order to promote good health and quality of life. To avoid significant noise impacts, we have strong protections in place in our planning system, in our environmental permitting systems, in our vehicle and product standards regulations and, of course, in our noise abatement legislation. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be engaging closely with stakeholders in the months ahead on what more we can do to effectively manage noise in ways that best address the country's needs.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. I fully endorse what she said and what you said, Mr Speaker, about the Voice & Vote exhibition in Westminster Hall.

As Gareth Southgate's finest get ready to face the might of Belgium, the Prime Minister, almost ironically, is off to Brussels today. I wonder who will fare better in the battles with Barnier's barmy bureaucrat army. Where Gareth Southgate has Harry Kane as his mercurial, talismanic front man, the Prime Minister has, well, the Foreign Secretary and his woeful disciplinary record and tendency to mouth off at his own side before being offered up for transfer. Where Southgate's side is a well-organised, disciplined unit, the Prime Minister's could not be more shambolic and undisciplined—they are more likely to score a series of own goals. As all the St George's flags go up today, we can all join in: we only sing when we're leaving.

[Pete Wishart]

May we please have a debate on all this dark money that is running rampant through some political parties in this House? Earlier this week, an investigation by BBC Northern Ireland shone a shocking light on the practices of former Scottish Conservative vice-chair Richard Cook and some of the leave campaign's funding. The investigation raises further questions about donations to the Scottish Conservatives.

The shady Scottish Unionist Association Trust has given or loaned some £319,000 to Conservative candidates in Scotland. This trust has no official address and no history of transparency but has made donations to at least two Scottish Conservative Members. I have asked the Electoral Commission to fully investigate the Scottish Unionist Association Trust—this murky organisation has been bankrolling the Tories in Scotland for the past few years—but we need a full debate on this dark money, as I fear we have seen only the tip of the Scottish Tory dodgy donations iceberg.

Lastly, the Scottish schools have broken up for the summer holidays. Whereas Members representing English constituencies will again benefit from being able to spend the full summer holidays with their school-age children, we from Scotland will not. On behalf of all Scottish Members here today, I thank the Leader of the House once again.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman did not say who he will be supporting today. Is it Belgium or is it England? Is it the Prime Minister or is it Michel Barnier? It would be interesting to know the answers, but I appreciate that it is for me to answer the questions, and I absolutely assure him that I will be supporting England all the way. I would go a step further and say that I will always support the entire United Kingdom.

Valerie Vaz: What about the Prime Minister?

Andrea Leadsom: I fully support the Prime Minister, and I think she is doing a superb job of representing the interests of the entire United Kingdom as we seek a good Brexit.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) asked about the Electoral Commission, and this is a very serious issue. There are Scotland questions on 11 July, and I expect and anticipate that he will raise the question then, which would be the appropriate point.

I am very aware and very concerned that schools in Scotland break up sooner than schools in other parts of the United Kingdom. As I promised I would, I have sought a childcare solution for Scottish Members, and I understand from feedback that it is not exactly what they wanted. I am keen to try to help with this, and I do understand. It is difficult for all of us when we want to spend time with our children in the holidays, and I am keen to meet the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to discuss what more we can do to facilitate some of their children being able to spend a bit of time enjoying themselves here while, at the same time, having time with their parents.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I think the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) is sporting a kind of England tie, and we should hear from the fellow. His tie is very natty indeed.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Britain has a record number of outstanding breweries, including four in my constituency and the excellent Hook Norton Brewery in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), whom I am meeting this afternoon. Might we have time for a debate on the opportunities after Brexit to restructure beer duty in order to support not only our excellent brewers, but our vital community pubs?

Andrea Leadsom: I know my hon. Friend chairs the all-party group on beer, which promotes great UK beers. I have a number of brewers in my constituency who have had the pleasure of bringing a barrel to the Strangers' Bar here in Parliament. We are all big supporters of brewers in our own areas, and he is right to point out the opportunities Brexit provides. These beers are superb UK products, and we need to do everything we can to promote the excellent and rising exports of British food and drink as we leave the EU.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): In the aftermath of yesterday's events in Russia, I am just wondering whether the Leader of the House can explain to the House what the word "schadenfreude" means.

I know this is a big ask, but I really would welcome it if, through the usual channels, we could get an early indication of the time allocations for the Backbench Business Committee in both the run-up to the summer recess and the two weeks in September, as we have to try to plan ahead for those eventualities. Lastly, yesterday I had the privilege of hosting a very successful lobby by providers, workers and clients of the care sector for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. There is a big problem with back pay for sleep-in workers, which has not yet been resolved. May we have an early indication or a statement from the Government about how that is progressing, because the sector is becoming very uneasy about it and some contractors are actually thinking about handing in contracts and leaving local authorities with the burden of looking after their clients, and that will be a big problem?

Andrea Leadsom: I feel I should say that I felt quite sad for Germany, as it was a difficult blow yesterday—

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Really?

Andrea Leadsom: Sorry, but I did feel some sympathy there. We will absolutely take on board the hon. Gentleman's request for as much notice as possible of Backbench Business Committee days in the run-up to the recess and in our September sitting. I will take that away and discuss it with my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip. The hon. Gentleman also raises the important issue of adults with learning disabilities. He will be aware that the subject has serious implications for the charities sector, with many organisations facing significant bills should what he suggests be the solution on back pay. The Government are looking carefully at the issue, which could be a useful subject for a Backbench Business Committee debate—he could apply to himself for that. I know the Government would welcome any debate on a resolution to this very tricky issue.

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Being a footballing aficionado yourself, Mr Speaker, you will know that England's progress in the World cup has spawned a patriotic, heartwarming display of flags in homes across the nation. It is time that Government caught up with the people. The Department for International Trade was the first this morning to raise the cross of St George. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a Minister to come here to assure us that all Government buildings will fly the flag, as this is an urgent matter? You know that this is about even more than sport. When that which unites us is greater than any division, communal pride and shared endeavour nourish the national interest and nurture the common good.

Mr Speaker: How very beautiful.

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend is never short of things to say about anything, which is a great relief to the House. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, it is her intention to fly the England flag over Downing Street not only today, but next year when the women's world championships take place. That is important, and I entirely support the equality there, but I also encourage all other Whitehall Departments to consider whether they, too, can support England in the crucial battle this evening.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Leader of the House for what she said and the right hon. Gentleman for his characteristically eloquent, almost poetical, inquiry. In response to what the Leader of the House said on the Government's behalf, I am keen that the House shows its support for the England team in the World cup, as I would be if any of the other home nations were competing, as I hope that they will be in 2022. I have therefore decided that the House of Commons will indeed fly the St George's flag for the next England game, which will be on Monday 2 July or Tuesday 3 July, dependent on the outcome of today's match against Belgium. I know that I speak for the whole House in wishing the three lions the best of luck tonight.

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

Mr Speaker: I have been mugging up on the hon. Gentleman's illustrious local government career over the past half an hour. Llŵchwr and Lliw unitary district council benefited from the hon. Gentleman's membership of it between 1972 and 1979, when he was an august lecturer at Swansea University. I am sure the hon. Gentleman is pleased to be reminded of that important part of his distinguished career, and the House is now also aware of it.

Mr Sheerman: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I also thank all the people who put together that great exhibition, from which we will all benefit. Quite soon, we ought also to celebrate the emancipation of working-class men—men without property—who waited a long, long time to get the vote. It was only in 1892 that Kier Hardy was the first Labour MP elected—ironically for West Ham.

I have a very serious question about health. Yes, we have had some interesting and positive news about there being more money for the health service, but may we have a focused debate on the way in which so many

health trusts and communities are blighted by bad private finance initiatives? They are not going to go away and many areas, including Huddersfield, will never overcome the barriers that we have to good health provision until someone sorts out the PFI burden.

Andrea Leadsom: I heartily agree with you, Mr Speaker: were any of the other nations of the United Kingdom in the World cup, we would of course all be shouting for them. I absolutely agree with that. I also wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should celebrate the right of working-class men to get the vote. I am afraid that that is slightly overshadowed, albeit understandably, by the first women getting the vote, but he is nevertheless right to point out the significant triumph of working-class men getting the vote in that same Act. I join him in commending them.

The hon. Gentleman raised an important point about health and the issues relating to PFIs and what they have done. I remember that when I was a Back-Bench member of the Treasury Committee, we published a widely viewed report, which included a wide range of participation, on PFI and some of the horrors of how it had damaged finances, not only in the health sector but in schools and so on. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that great efforts were made to see what could be done to ensure that future PFIs did not suffer from the same problems. I encourage him to raise the issue at Treasury questions next Tuesday, because although he asked about PFIs for hospitals, it is the Treasury that can actually influence what happens with PFIs, both retrospectively and going forward.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I draw the House's attention to the fact that Tottenham or ex-Tottenham players are scoring almost all the goals in the World cup.

I wish to raise a serious point: the impending closure of the Swaminarayan School in Neasden means that 1,000 pupils and their parents will lose the school of their choice, and Hindu education in north-west London will be extremely damaged as a result. Will my right hon. Friend find time in the Government agenda for a debate on religious education, because parents should be able to choose the type of education that they wish for their children?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an important constituency matter. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate about the particular school he mentioned. The need for parental choice is of course absolutely key. However, I am sure he would join me in celebrating the fact that now, overall, 1.9 million more pupils are in good or outstanding schools than in 2010, and 89% of schools in England are now rated as good or outstanding, up from 68% in 2010. This Government have taken education in a good and strong direction, including in respect of parental choice, but I encourage my hon. Friend to seek to speak to Ministers directly.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Can we have a statement on the Government's support for business? I note that the Leader of the Conservatives in the Welsh Assembly has resigned following his inflammatory remarks about Airbus after it expressed its reasonable concerns about Brexit. Who would have thought that senior Conservatives would turn their back on business?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will know that it is this Government and it is the Conservatives who, over the years, have always backed businesses. We have presided over lowering corporation tax rates to ensure that businesses are more competitive and presided over reducing regulation that creates enormous burdens for businesses. As I said to the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) when she made her accusations about business in the run-up to Brexit, it is this Government who have been listening to businesses all the way through. It is the reason why we have sought an implementation period for our departure from the European Union to ensure that there is continuity for business. That is vital. There is enormous engagement going on, and that will continue to be the case as we seek a good trade deal that works for businesses in the UK as well as for those in the EU 27.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): On Saturday, Forres will host the European pipe band championships for the final time. Every year since 2013, when it was first held, more than 20,000 visitors have gone to Grant park for this event, and the natural amphitheatre makes it very highly regarded by competitors from around the world. Can we have a debate on the success of piping at Forres, which will also allow us the opportunity to congratulate the army of volunteers who have put in so much effort to make this a truly world-class event?

Andrea Leadsom: As ever, my hon. Friend is raising what sounds like an excellent constituency event. May I particularly commend him, because, as an assistant referee, he could right now be taking part in the World cup, but he has chosen instead to be here in this place representing his constituency? I join him in congratulating all those involved in the European pipe band championships. I know how successful they have been with countless hard-working volunteers. More than 100 bands from across the world are due to attend on Saturday. I do wish them all a fantastic day.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): It is really not good enough simply to cancel the Swansea Bay lagoon and put the whole issue of lagoon technology for renewable energy at risk. North Wales also has proposals for a lagoon, which, following the Hendry review, is now completely up in the air. Will the Minister give time for a debate on whether lagoon technology has a future?

Andrea Leadsom: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government have looked very carefully at the issue of the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon, and at the other projects as well. As he will be aware, the Swansea Bay proposal would cost £1.3 billion to build, but would have produced only around 0.15% of the electricity that we use each year, which is a capital cost more than three times as much per unit of electricity as Hinkley Point C. Therefore, it simply was not good value for the taxpayer.

However, I stress that this Government have been absolutely committed to success in Wales, as demonstrated, I think, by abolishing tolls on the Severn bridge by the end of 2018; by the city and growth deals that have been signed for Cardiff and Swansea; by the deals that are being negotiated for north Wales; by the Government's willingness to look at a deal for mid-Wales as well; and by the £150 million for the Swansea Bay city deal, which will deliver £1.3 billion of investment to the region and

9,000 jobs. This Government are fully committed to the success of Wales commensurate with good value for taxpayers' money.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Next Friday, 63 Bills will be offered for Second Reading. None of them will be debated. Four of them are in my name: one to end voter fraud; another to abolish hospital car parking charges; another to have a Business of the House Committee; and another to have an independence day bank holiday on 23 June. A senior Whip will jump up and object to all those Bills. It is a complete farce. Does the Leader of the House agree that the private Member's Bill system needs reform, and that the Government will continue to block every private Member's Bill that does not have a Second Reading debate?

Andrea Leadsom: The Government are fully committed to the success of both the process and the reality of private Members' Bills. The number of PMBs passed under this Government and the coalition Government far exceeds that of the last Labour Government. In the 2005 Parliament, 22 private Members' Bills received Royal Assent. In 2010, 31 private Members' Bills received Royal Assent; and if we include the 2015 to 2017 Parliament, the number is more than double that achieved in 2005. There is no question but that there are some very important private Members' Bills, including the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation and Liability for Housing Standards) Bill of the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) and the Stalking Protection Bill from my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). These are very important measures that the Government are pleased to support. The Select Committee on Procedure reviewed the PMB process in the last Parliament and the Government responded to its reports. Should the Committee choose to look further at the PMB process, the Government and I will of course look closely at its recommendations.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): On the football theme, with a German husband, obviously last night was fairly traumatic in our household, although it does spare me from having to watch another several weeks of football. Quite unexpectedly for Conservative Members, let me say that we wish the England team well. They are having great success and it is great to see them not suffering from being put away in military camps, as has been the case in the past.

On a serious note, the scandal in Gosport has again raised the issue of whistleblowers and their importance to patient safety. May we have a debate in Government time on the reform of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998? The legislation is 20 years old and frankly does not provide any protection to whistleblowers; when they come forward in good faith, they discover that they are throwing their careers down the pan. That is wrong and it is dangerous.

Andrea Leadsom: With regards to the hon. Lady's remarks about the football, may I say that every cloud has a silver lining?

Dr Whitford: My husband will not be happy if he hears this.

Andrea Leadsom: I did say that I felt very sorry for the Germans; the hon. Lady can pass that on to him. I thank her for confirming that she and Members of the

Scottish National party wish the England team luck. That is no surprise to hon. Members across the House. We are a family with ancient, historic, cultural and familial links that we should celebrate at all times.

The hon. Lady raised an incredibly important point about the Gosport review and the independent panel's report. As she knows, the Health Secretary came to update the House on the findings of the Gosport review as soon as he was able last week. I am sure that there will be further reports from Ministers on how we intend to tackle the matter, but the hon. Lady makes a very sensible suggestion, which I encourage her to raise directly with Ministers.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): It has been a particularly unpleasant summer for some residents in towns such as Thatcham and Newbury, and in the area of my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), because of illegal encampments by Travellers. Would my right hon. Friend consider an opportunity in this House for colleagues who have experienced similar problems in their constituencies to raise the need for a change in the law? The situation is totally unacceptable for law-abiding people whose lives have been made a misery by the selfish and illegal actions of these individuals.

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend raises an issue that, unfortunately, crops up time and again in this place, as many hon. and right hon. Members have grave concerns about illegal Traveller encampments in their constituencies. He will be aware that we have recently had debates on the subject, both in this Chamber and in Westminster Hall. The Government are now looking at whether there are sufficient powers and it is a matter of enforcement, or whether more powers are needed to enable local authorities to deal effectively with what is a really serious problem for local communities.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Last week I asked the Leader of the House to outline how the Government would update us on progress on their serious violence strategy. She was not entirely sure on how but said that they would do so. As part of the early intervention and prevention aspect of the work, can we have a debate on adverse childhood experiences?

Andrea Leadsom: I would certainly support a debate on adverse childhood experiences. In fact, someone I have worked with for many years who is a real expert in that subject was here only this week for a Select Committee inquiry into adverse childhood experiences and the impact on early brain development. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the very serious issue of the impact of appalling early experiences on young people who then find themselves on the conveyor belt into a life of crime. I would welcome a debate on that. I have said to her that Ministers will come forward with further updates, and that remains the case. If she wants to write to me, I can take it up directly with Ministers on her behalf, but in the meantime, I strongly urge her to seek a Backbench or Adjournment debate to raise the issue of ACEs.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Responsible waste management is vital to increase recycling and reduce landfill, but it ought not to be a tortuous or overly

expensive process for small businesses. Some create very little waste, which can be managed alongside domestic refuse at no additional cost to the business or the environment. Can we have a debate on Bolton Council's extreme interpretation of the law, which results in less recycling, more landfill, small business fines and harassment?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is quite right to raise that important constituency issue. Businesses are responsible for finding their own waste operator, so that they can choose one whose charges fit their budget. Some councils collect business waste but will charge for that. He is right that we intend to review how business waste is handled. We want businesses to recycle more and to play their part in reducing waste to landfill. More detail of that will be in the resources and waste strategy that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will publish in autumn.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): In terms of the loyalty test, this London Scot always supports England—except when they play Scotland. I hope the whole House wishes the Prime Minister well in negotiations with Monsieur Barnier; it is not the best day to be in Brussels, but that is another matter.

Can we have a statement from the Ministry of Justice on the operation of first-tier tribunals, especially with regard to section 24 powers, which appear to be failing so badly? I have written and have failed on four occasions so far to secure an Adjournment debate on the subject, so anything the Leader of the House can do would be very much appreciated.

Andrea Leadsom: I thank the hon. Gentleman for putting on the record his views on the football prowess of the United Kingdom. Perhaps we ought to have a survey of all Members, so that everyone can put their priorities on the record. This is fast becoming a serious and important issue.

The hon. Gentleman raises a key point about first-tier tribunals. There are Justice questions on 10 July, and I encourage him to raise that directly with Ministers then, or if he wants to write to me, I can take it up on his behalf.

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): In my constituency and across the wider NHS Grampian area, there has been a surge in deaths over the past year linked to the use of the drug alprazolam, a tranquiliser that is commonly marketed under the brand name of Xanax. The drug is not available on the NHS, but an investigation by my local newspaper, the *Evening Express*, showed that the drug can be obtained within minutes online. The rate of fatalities in north-east Scotland has been described as a public health emergency, and while the biggest rises were in areas such as Grampian, Police Scotland has said that this is a national problem that needs to be addressed. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the House must debate this urgent matter?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that important and concerning issue. In Scotland, health and justice are devolved matters. However, misuse of drugs such as Xanax, which is the brand name for alprazolam, is a cause for concern across the whole of the UK, and we remain vigilant to take any measures

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

deemed necessary to address those issues. For example, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency is currently running a behavioural change campaign to warn people about the dangers of buying drugs online. He is right to raise that, and I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate, so that he can take it up directly with Ministers.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Last week, I attended a fantastic assembly at St Vincent's RC school in Norden in my constituency, and I pay tribute to all the work done by the pupils and teachers on the Send My Friend to School "Make Schools Safe" campaign. May we have a debate in Government time on such campaigns, and on how we can help our international partners achieve sustainable development goal 4 on quality education for all?

Andrea Leadsom: I join the hon. Lady in congratulating St Vincent's school on its work. Many young people are taking part in these fantastic campaigns. She will be aware that we will have International Development questions next Wednesday— 4 July—and I encourage her to raise the question of what more can be done directly with Ministers then.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): A recent report provided evidence that trade could be increased by £12 billion and 150,000 jobs created in the north of England if seven major ports, including Immingham in my constituency, were given free port status, which would clearly be a massive boost to the economy post-Brexit. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate in Government time to explore these great opportunities?

Andrea Leadsom: I am certainly interested in the issue of free ports, and my hon. Friend is right to raise the potential of ports such as Immingham. We will have Transport questions on Thursday 5 July, when he may like to take that up directly with Ministers.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): The Transport Committee's report out today confirms that regions such as Yorkshire and the Humber have not received a fair share of rail funding for years and that the formula used by the Department for Transport is unfair to northern regions. May we have a debate in Government time on what exactly the Government will do to remedy this unfair situation and give regions such as mine the transport system that we deserve?

Andrea Leadsom: We in the Government are embarking on the biggest rail investment programme since the Victorian era. Thanks to our £48 billion investment in the rail network, we are rebuilding stations up and down the country, improving the carbon footprint and enabling many hundreds of thousands more passengers to use the rail network. The hon. Lady raises a very important issue about the fairness of infrastructure spending in the different regions. She will be aware that we have Transport questions on 5 July, when she may want to raise this specific issue with Ministers.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Last week, along with several other Members of the House, I was able to attend the royal highland show.

May we have time in this place for a debate to allow us to congratulate the organisers of the show, particularly the food producers, farmers and other exhibitors who put on such a fantastic show of British farming?

Andrea Leadsom: I absolutely join my hon. Friend in congratulating all those involved in the royal highland show. Every year, the show demonstrates the very best of the UK's world-leading food and drink sector. It is a testament to all those involved that such large crowds flock to it. I gather that nearly 200,000 visitors attended this year's show. There is no doubt that it is the premier fixture in Scotland's farming calendar, and I understand that it generates over £200 million for businesses.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Mr Speaker, I warmly welcome your announcement about flying the St George's flag over this building next week. I, too, was sorry to see Germany exit the World cup yesterday, mainly because I had Germany in the parliamentary Labour party sweepstake.

Will the Leader of the House join me in welcoming the official opening of the Denby Dale and District men's shed in my constituency recently? The volunteers there are absolutely phenomenal. Whether it is to go along and do a few crafts or simply have a cuppa and a chinwag, these men's sheds and men's clubs do wonderful work, particularly in addressing the issue of men's mental health and social isolation. May we have a debate on what men's clubs bring to our society?

Andrea Leadsom: I am deeply sorry that the hon. Lady has lost her stake. I am sure it was not too great a stake, but she probably had high hopes after drawing Germany in that sweepstake.

The hon. Lady raises an incredibly important point. Men's sheds do amazing work to try to improve men's mental health. This is often forgotten, but as we know, a key reason for death, particularly in young men, is suicide due to mental health problems. I absolutely join her in congratulating all those involved in the men's shed work in her constituency, and I wish them every success with it in the future.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): Nether Whitacre Parish Council in my constituency has highlighted the challenges its rural villages face from non-compliance with planning regulations in the green belt, saying that regular abusers of the planning system ignore requests from the local planning authority to remove temporary buildings. Following the recent Government consultation, can we have an urgent debate on how planning enforcement powers can be strengthened to further protect our countryside from unauthorised development?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is a strong campaigner for his area. As he knows, local planning authorities have a wide range of enforcement powers and strong penalties for non-compliance available to them to tackle unauthorised development. It is for them to decide how and when to use those powers, but as we have discussed, the recent consultation sought views on what, if any, further powers might be useful, particularly to help bring proceedings to quicker conclusions. We are looking at the responses to the consultation, and an announcement on the way forward will be made as soon as possible.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Transport Committee, which published its report this morning, says that the

“Government must increase support for regions short-changed on rail spending”.

It also criticises the cancellation of rail electrification schemes. With the cancellation carnage at TransPennine and the already cut-down service under the emergency timetable from Northern Rail, and given that the Prime Minister has not yet responded to the One North campaign by northern newspapers, can the Secretary of State for Transport please come to the House to give a statement about what is happening about rail in the north?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is right to speak up for her area. She will recall that the Secretary of State for Transport was here just last week for an Opposition day debate to talk about the rail situation, and he was keen to answer all questions pertaining to rail. We have Transport questions next Thursday, on 5 July, and I encourage her to take this up directly with him then.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I want to pick up on the point made by my hon. Friend—he really should be right honourable by now—the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) about childcare. No sooner will we come back from the conference recess than Scottish schools will go off on their October mid-term breaks, sometimes for two weeks. I would be very grateful if the Leader of the House were willing to meet me and others with an interest to see how the family room could be used for that purpose, rather than, as often happens, as a mobile office or, indeed, a World cup viewing room. If we could have that meeting, it would be appreciated.

Andrea Leadsom: As I said to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), I am keen to help provide a solution to this problem and would be very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends to discuss it further.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I drew Panama in our office sweepstake, so my Sunday was not so good—my cup doth not runneth over. As the World cup continues, will the Leader of the House join me in celebrating Bristol’s Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls, who have grown from a mates’ football kick-about to a loved Bristol sports club, social organisation and campaigning force, showing the world, through their activities, how football truly helps both world peace and community spirit?

Andrea Leadsom: I would have thought that the hon. Lady would be delighted to lose her stake, because it enabled England to face Belgium this evening, but nevertheless I am of course delighted to join her in congratulating her local community football group. It is true that sports of all sorts, but particularly football clubs, can engage young people and communities and do so much for their local communities. I wish them every success.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, send my best wishes to the English team in the World cup and welcome your initiative, Mr Speaker, to fly the flag. Across Northern Ireland, flags are flying everywhere—for a different reason, of course, but none the less they are flying, and our support for the English team is there.

Recent research conducted by Christian Solidarity Worldwide demonstrates that more than 1,000 people were killed in attacks by Fulani herder militia in farming communities in the five months between 1 January and 1 May. The Fulani herder militia is believed to have murdered more men, women and children in 2015 to 2017 than Boko Haram. The 2017 global terrorism index estimates that 60,000 people have been killed in the violence since 2001, hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced and crops and livestock worth billions have been destroyed. There is concern that there could be full-scale civil war. If ever there was a need for a debate, this is the time.

Andrea Leadsom: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his confirmation of support for the England football team. That was not in any doubt, but we are grateful for the confirmation. He raises, as he often does, an appalling example of human rights abuses, which are of grave concern to the House wherever and whenever they occur around the world. He may like to take the matter up at International Development questions on Wednesday 4 July, in order to hear directly from Ministers what the United Kingdom can do to protect the human rights of people around the world.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): As one of 38 Co-operative MPs in the House—we are the third-largest party grouping—I look forward to celebrating Co-operatives Fortnight, which kicks off on Monday, by visiting the Hawthorn housing co-operative in my constituency. I have been reading with great interest the Co-operative UK’s publication about the co-operative economy in 2018, which highlights the huge breadth of co-operative movements and mutual societies across the United Kingdom. Will the Leader of the House consider holding a debate in Government time about the huge importance of co-operative mutuals for the growth of our economy in the UK?

Andrea Leadsom: I absolutely applaud the hon. Gentleman for raising the value of the co-operative movement across the UK. I am a big fan of credit unions, which operate on a similar basis; they do so much to help people learn to save as well as borrow. The work that they do is incredibly valuable. I join him in congratulating the co-operative movement on all its efforts, and encourage him to seek a Back-Bench debate, so that he may share with other hon. Members their own experiences.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): My constituent, Ms Tomasiak, applied for an EU registration certificate last May, after which her documents, including a Polish passport, were lost when the Home Office erroneously sent them to the wrong address. May we therefore have a statement or a debate in Government time regarding the issue of compensation payments, with a view to reconsidering why there is no process to forward-fund the costs incurred by families challenged by financial circumstances, in obtaining photographs and replacing documents, and their travel expenses and loss of earnings, in similar such cases?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a very concerning constituency issue, and he is absolutely right to do so. I know that Home Office Ministers would be concerned to hear about it, and I encourage him to take it up directly with them; or if he wants to write to me directly, I can do so on his behalf.

Adult Social Care: Long-term Funding

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

Mr Speaker: We now come to the first Select Committee statement. Mr Clive Betts will speak on the joint report of the Health and Social Care Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee for up to 10 minutes, during which, I remind the House, no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, the Chair will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement and call Mr Clive Betts to respond to these in turn.

12.7 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time today for me to present the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and Health and Social Care Committee joint report on long-term funding of adult social care.

In 2017, the then Communities and Local Government Committee undertook a lengthy inquiry into adult social care. We concluded that spending on social care would need to rise significantly in the coming years, and that after successive failed attempts at reform, political parties across the spectrum needed to be involved in the process of reaching a solution. With that in mind, we returned to the issue in a joint inquiry with the Health and Social Care Committee, aiming to identify funding reforms that would be supported by the public and politicians, and to feed its findings into the Green Paper. I thank all members of both Committees for the constructive role they have played, and particularly the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, who is so knowledgeable on these matters and with whom it has been a genuine pleasure to work on this inquiry.

To find out the public's views on how social care should be funded, we commissioned a citizens' assembly, which I understand is the first held by the UK Parliament. Following a process of learning, deliberating and decision making, which took place over two weekends in April and May, a representative sample of nearly 50 members of the public was asked how best to fund social care. We have listened carefully to the assembly members' views. They have been vital in informing our thinking, and are reflected throughout our report. We have taken the unusual step of specifically addressing our recommendations to both sides of the political divide, asking that both Government and Opposition Front Benchers accept them.

What are the challenges facing social care and what funding is required to address them? The critical state of social care and the very serious consequences for people who receive care, and those who do not, and their unpaid carers and families, as well as the NHS, is well documented. The evidence was clear that the combination of rising demand and costs combined with reductions in funding to local authorities has placed the social care system under very great and unsustainable strain.

Despite the welcome additional funding provided by the Government in recent years, local authorities face a funding gap of around £2.5 billion in 2020. This has been confirmed by the National Audit Office, the King's

Fund and the Nuffield Trust, as well as the Local Government Association. The consequences are extremely serious and widespread, leading to people going without the care they need, and the time and quality of care not being sufficient for many who receive it, leading to unpaid carers having to step into the breach and placing significant pressures on care providers and the care workforce.

A witness to the inquiry, Sir Andrew Dilnot, chair of the 2011 Dilnot commission, told us that the system was consequently now at risk of "fairly significant disaster", which were very strong words indeed. We concluded that considerable extra funding in the order of many billions of pounds would be needed in the coming years for the following reasons.

We need to fill the funding gap that I just referred to and we then need to provide additional funding to meet future demand. The personal social services research unit at the London School of Economics projects that spending on both social services for older people and younger adults will more than double by 2014, even without the improvements to the service that we suggest. It is also important to meet the care needs of a wider group of people—not just those whose needs are critical or substantial, but those who have moderate needs that are currently largely unmet. Age UK estimates that around 1 million who need care currently do not get it. Finally, and very importantly, we need to ensure that the care provided is good care from a stable, well-paid and well-trained workforce and viable care providers.

The difficult question for the Government and the Opposition to grapple with is where the additional funding for adult social care and social care for people of a working age with disabilities should come from, what it should be spent on, and how the care should be delivered. On care provision, we are strongly of the view that the responsibility for the delivery of social care should continue to rest with local councils at a local level. Social care provision should not, however, be seen in isolation. There is a need for better integration at a local level particularly within the NHS, as well as housing services. After all, most people receiving care get it in their homes. Integration should be seen not as a matter of bureaucratic convenience, but as a way of improving the care that individuals receive. The integrated care partnerships and health and wellbeing boards have an important role to play in that.

Our citizens' assembly members expressed strong support for a social care system that, like the NHS, is free at the point of use. We acknowledge that this would increase costs substantially and be unlikely to be affordable immediately. We believe, however, that it is an ultimate objective for the personal care element of social care to be delivered free to everyone who needs it, and that accommodation costs should continue to be paid on a means-tested basis. This direction of travel should begin with the extension of free personal care to those deemed to have critical needs.

Now for the important question: where should the funding come from? Given the scale of the additional funding that is likely to be needed, which I have explained, we recommend that a combination of different fundraising measures are needed at local and national levels. At a local level, there should be a continuation for the foreseeable future of the existing local government revenue streams. We recommend that, in 2020, this funding is enhanced

through using the additional revenue from 75% business rate retention, rather than the Government's proposal to use the money to replace grants such as the public health grant. In the medium term, we recommend a reform of the council tax valuations and bands to bring them up to date. As other funding streams develop, the contribution from council tax and business rates to social care funding could fall, allowing councils to better fund other important services.

However, local government funding will only ever be one part of the solution for social care, given the scale of the challenge. It is clear that extra revenue will also need to be raised nationally to be spent on local provision. The citizens' assembly was strongly in favour of any extra taxation being earmarked, wanting the clear assurance that the money raised would be spent on social care. We therefore recommend that an additional earmarked contribution, described as a "social care premium", should be introduced, to which employers, as well as employees, would contribute. For fairness, it would be paid on earnings above a threshold and with the current national insurance limit lifted. We suggest that this premium could either be as an additional element to national insurance, which would ensure the accountability desired by the public and the citizens' assembly, to be placed in an appropriately named and dedicated fund, and regularly and independently audited, or be paid into independent insurance funds, similar to the German model.

We strongly believe that a funding solution must fall fairly between generations and therefore recommend that those aged under 40 should be exempt from the social care premium, and that it should also be paid by those who are still working after the age of 65. We also recommend that a specified additional amount of inheritance tax should be levied on all estates above a certain threshold and capped at a percentage of the total value. This is intended to avoid the catastrophic costs for some individuals, who currently have to lose the vast majority of their assets, including their homes, to pay for care costs. It would pool the risk and spread the burden more fairly, a key recommendation of the citizens' assembly. My view is that, if everyone who can afford it pays something, no one should have to lose everything.

After successive attempts at reform, the forthcoming social care Green Paper must be the catalyst for achieving a fair, long-term and sustainable settlement. It also ought to recognise the care needs of those of working age with disabilities, as well as the care needs of the elderly. To ensure that, we recommend that our work should now be taken forward by a cross-party parliamentary commission.

I say, on behalf of both Select Committees, to Government and Opposition Front Benchers that if we, on a cross-party, cross-Committee basis, can unanimously reach difficult decisions and make clear recommendations, can they not do the same? Use our proposals as a basis for building the wider consensus that we need to create a long-term, sustainable funding solution for those who need care now and in the future.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I thank my co-Chair for the dedicated work that he has put into this joint report, as well as all members of both Committees and our wonderful supporting Committee teams. Like him,

I thank not only all those who took part in the citizens' assembly and those who advised and supported them, but the very many people, and their loved ones, who depend on social care, who wrote to us and whom we visited on our Committee visit. They told us moving stories about the level of unmet need and the consequences, both for themselves and their families.

The situation could not be more stark. As we approach the 70th anniversary of the NHS next week, would my hon. Friend say more about the impact on the NHS if we fail to address the unmet need in social care?

Mr Betts: I thank the hon. Lady, the Chair of the Health Committee—I think on this occasion, my hon. Friend, because we have worked on a friendly basis on this inquiry. She is absolutely right. One of the important recommendations is about trying to extend the scope of care provision to include those with moderate needs. If we provide care for them, it is quite likely that we will stop them getting into the substantial and critical phase and ending up in hospital in the first place. In terms of the NHS, it is about stopping people getting into hospital by getting them proper care and having care available for people in hospital, so that they do not have delayed discharges. In those two ways, that can be beneficial. Of course, we can also join up services. Can the NHS district nurse who goes into someone's home and looks at their needs not assess their care needs at the same time? Can we not get that sort of joined-up approach?

It was remiss of me not to thank the staff, as the hon. Lady did, and I will name Laura and Tamsin. The work they did on this was exceptional. To produce a report of this quality in the time available was absolutely first-class, and we should congratulate them on it.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I thank the Chairs and the members of the Select Committees for their work on the report, and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) for his statement introducing it. The key points from the report for me are that in its present state the care system is not fit to respond to current needs let alone predicted future needs, and that spending on social care needs to rise. Next week is the 70th birthday of social care, as well as of the NHS, but there is no funding settlement and no celebrations for social care. Does my hon. Friend agree that the time for a funding settlement for social care is now or at least soon, not years down the road?

Mr Betts: Yes, I completely agree with that. We have got to get on with it. If we agreed everything now, it would probably take two or three years to put it in place. That is why we suggested the stop-gap measure of the extra business rates in 2020 being made available for local authorities. We thought that was a very important solution. If we get it right, we can have stability for the long term. The Germans did this over 20 years ago. They have a stable system and it works. They have just put extra money into it with general public support, because everyone trusts the system. That is the position we have to get to.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I, too, pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) for the way he chaired the Committee; it was very collegiate and consensual, which really helped

[*Andrew Selous*]

us in our deliberations. He may remember that when we visited a care home the residents and families of those receiving care accused this Parliament of a lack of courage for not having addressed this difficult issue for so long. Does he agree that there is a real sense of urgency? When the Government produce a Green Paper in the autumn, we need to get on with it. There is no reason why we cannot move this forward quite quickly. As he said, Germany has done it since 1994. Frankly, it shames this country that Germany has had a good system in place for so long, while we have not.

Mr Betts: I completely agree. If we are still talking about this in two or three years' time we will have failed. We have to get some decisions and get on with it. As politicians, we are often very good at coming up with ways to spend money. In this report we have actually come up with ways to raise money, which is the difficult part. We have done the heavy lifting for both the Government and the Opposition Front Benches. We now say, "We've handed the pass over to you. Get on and run with it and make it work."

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I, too, welcome this cross-Committee report and note that it aspires to provide free personal care, as we have in Scotland, and to extend it to those in need under 65, which we will start next April. While that has significant costs, does the hon. Gentleman agree with the assessment of the Scottish experience by the King's Fund and the Health Foundation, which suggested that overall it saves money, because people can remain in their own homes rather than care homes and rather than being admitted to hospital?

Mr Betts: I saw the King's Fund report and I have seen the analysis. That was an aspiration eventually. However, the Select Committees' felt that the immediate pressures of the funding gap, which will grow if we do not do anything about it—because of the demographics over the next few years, the fact that we are not meeting the needs of those with moderate care needs, the fact that we are not paying our workforce properly and that many care providers are in financial difficulties—mean that those issues have to be addressed and then, eventually, we can move on to the free care aspiration set out in the report over the longer period.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his statement, and both Select Committees on their report. He said that if everyone contributes something, we should be able to sort out the funding problem. He put great emphasis on the need for a social care premium and praised the German model. In the report, he specifically says that under 40s should be exempt from the social care premium. The argument from the older generation will be that they have paid taxes throughout their lives, so why should they be unfairly burdened? What is the experience in Germany with regard to the social care premium? Does Germany exempt people under 40?

Mr Betts: It is a difficult decision. Germany does not exempt people under 40, but there are other tweaks to the system. For example, people without children pay extra and people who are not working pay extra in

retirement because they do not have an employer contribution. We have not just mirrored the German system absolutely. We have taken elements from it, which I think is quite right. Japan's system is not dissimilar and it does restrict payments to those over 40. We have looked at different systems. It is a challenge, but in the end we felt that there were considerable pressures on younger people at this point in time: family pressures, housing pressures, job pressures. We therefore felt that to start at 40 was a reasonable benchmark, bearing in mind that for the vast majority of people it will mean that they will pay into the care system at some point in their lives.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Is it not remarkable, given the failure of successive Governments to grasp this nettle, that two cross-party Committees with Members holding widely different views and ideologies managed to agree a unanimous report? Does that not make it even more incumbent on the Government, given the acuteness of the crisis, to take this report very seriously and to implement its recommendations as quickly as possible?

Mr Betts: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend. The fundamental question is: if we can do it, why can't they? We have done the difficult part. We have set out a framework. Those on the Government Front Bench may not want to accept every detailed element of it, but it is there to work from. It should mean that we ought to be able to get to a consensus and an agreement about what should be done in a much shorter period of time than the years the Government were perhaps initially contemplating.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I thank both Chairs for the very constructive nature of the inquiry and the discussions around it, which have led to the report. We need to depoliticise this issue—that is critical—and I believe we have done that in the report. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the most important parts of the report is not just the money it would raise, but how it would be delivered? Individuals who are in receipt of care can direct the payments to their loved ones, the people who know them best and can give them the best possible care. That care being delivered by the people who understand them best and love them the most will strengthen the social fabric of our communities.

Mr Betts: Yes, I completely agree. I could not refer to every specific recommendation in my statement. The hon. Gentleman is referring to paragraph 78 of the report, where it states that instead of care being delivered to people, they could receive a cash payment so their family members could do it in a way that suits them best.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the report and on the work of the Committees to deal with this very difficult subject. In my constituency, we have a problem with nursing care homes closing and being converted into residential care homes, because of a problem with recruitment and retention of nursing staff. I am glad he mentioned that the care being given has to be good quality. Will he say how the increased funding would help with that situation and give us the nursing home beds we need?

Mr Betts: It is about getting a well-paid, well-trained workforce. NHS staff who do a similar job get paid about 29% more. I am not saying they are well paid, but clearly social care staff are not well paid. That funding gap has to be addressed and people have to be properly paid. The Committees signed up to the Unison charter for the workforce in social care.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on their leadership on this issue. The inquiry's report provides incontrovertible evidence of the crisis facing social care funding. I particularly welcome the recommendation that social care should be provided to those who need it free at the point of delivery, and the very practical recommendations for raising the additional funding we so urgently need. I come to the House from a meeting of supported housing providers, which provide housing for older people in my constituency and elsewhere in Southwark. All highlighted to me the increasing numbers of referrals they receive from older people who are being made homeless and suffering problems in the private rented sector. This problem is growing. The report highlights the importance of housing for the delivery of a sustainable social care system and I wonder whether my hon. Friend might just say a little bit about that now.

Mr Betts: Absolutely. Most people receive care in their own home. The Committee's report on housing for older people looked at the nature of the home. It showed the importance of the warmth of the home and the ability to get around the home—trip hazards and so on. Means-testing for the disability facilities grant relates to means-testing for care provision and other benefits, so they need to be properly integrated. Another recommendation in the report was that where means tests exist, they need to be joined up together.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The economics of the sector are fluid. Does my hon. Friend agree that there has been a high turnover of ownership of care provider organisations? The Government need to monitor buyouts in the sector carefully, so that those living in care do not worry about who owns their home.

Mr Betts: Absolutely. The Committee did not discuss the ownership of care homes, but we did discuss the number of homes that had gone out of business or had

been contracted back to local authorities. This is an ongoing and very real problem. We need not just a well-paid and well-trained workforce but viable care providers, so the money needs to be there for the providers as well as the workforce.

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I thank the Chairs, the members and the staff of both Committees, and congratulate them on producing an exceptional document. I also congratulate them on their extremely collaborative approach to their work, which is incredibly refreshing. For too long this issue has been used as a political football to be kicked around, but I am afraid it is too late for that now. We no longer have that luxury; we must reach a sufficient settlement. As other Members have pointed out, successive Governments have failed to address this issue. The Committees' consultative, collaborative and constructive approach has been very positive and has been warmly welcomed, as, indeed, has been their engagement with the citizens' assembly.

As has been made clear by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, we want to integrate plans for social care with the new NHS plan that the Prime Minister announced recently. It would not make sense to publish it before the NHS plan has even been drafted, so our Green Paper will be published at the same time as the plan. It will cover the Government's proposals on a wide range of social care issues, including, but not limited to, the need for the social care market to be sustainable for the future. It will also build on policies such as our "Carers action plan": we will, for example, consult on proposals to provide better support for unpaid carers.

The report will be incredibly valuable to our work. It will enhance our plans for the Green Paper, and will ensure that it can offer people a sustainable future and the knowledge that as they approach their later years, they will do so in security and safety and with quality provision.

Mr Betts: Again, I thank all the members and staff of the Committees for their work. The challenge now lies with the Government and with Ministers. There should not be any more long grass out there to kick things into. We want to see Government and Opposition working together and starting to make the difficult decisions that need to be made for the benefit of the people who need the care, both the elderly and those of working age.

Leaving the EU: Parliamentary Scrutiny

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

12.32 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for giving me the opportunity to present the sixth report of the Exiting the European Union Committee, on parliamentary scrutiny and approval of the withdrawal agreement and negotiations on a future partnership. I am grateful to all those who gave evidence to the Committee, including two Ministers from the Department for Exiting the European Union—and it is good to see a third here today. I am also grateful to the terrific team who support us in our work, and to all the members of the Committee. On occasion we are not able to agree on everything, but that is the nature of Brexit.

The Committee thought that it would be helpful to the House to set out the task that will face us as the process of leaving the European Union unfolds, and that is what the report covers. Let me say first that time is very tight. Even if we secure a withdrawal agreement and a political declaration at the October Council—and that must now be in doubt—the Committee will expect to take evidence from the Secretary of State as soon as possible thereafter so that we can report to the House. That would probably take us to about mid-November for Parliament's debate and meaningful vote to approve the agreement. We recommend that the debate should last at least five days, which is the amount of time that was provided in 1971 for the House to debate whether we should join the common market.

This will be a very important moment, and the Committee believes that the debate will need to be managed in a way that gives the House an opportunity to express its opinion clearly. We recommend that the Business of the House motion should make it possible for the Speaker to select a series of different amendments, and we are asking the Procedure Committee to advise on how that could best be done.

If this House and the other place approve the withdrawal agreement, the Government will introduce a withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill to give effect to it in UK law. The Bill will have to receive Royal Assent before we leave the EU, because otherwise the UK would be bound by the agreement without the legislation to implement it. That would put the country potentially in breach of international law, and would create legal uncertainty for businesses and citizens.

We could have just three to four months, or approximately 60 to 70 sitting days, in which to pass the Bill. Given that it took more than 11 months for the European Withdrawal (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to complete its passage, that is not a lot of time for the scrutiny that will be required. We then need to add to that the 21-day CRaG process—which relates to the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010—for the ratification of treaties, which is likely to take place in parallel with the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill, and the time required for other Bills to do with Brexit, and statutory instruments that will need to be passed before exit day. We shall be legislating for a new immigration system, a new customs system, new systems for agricultural support, a new

legal basis for management of our fisheries, and lots of other things. When we consider all that, the scale of the task becomes very clear.

Now, let us imagine for a moment that the withdrawal agreement and political declaration are not finalised at the October Council. Given where we are, that would not be surprising. Indeed, the draft conclusions from the European Council suggest that there will not be a breakthrough in negotiations today or tomorrow. On the contrary, the EU is saying that we need to speed up the process—although I would observe that it takes two to move faster—and it wants much greater clarity about what the UK is seeking for the future partnership.

The fact that, two years after the referendum, Ministers have yet to reach agreement on what kind of customs arrangements they would like with our biggest, nearest and most important trading partner reminds us how much more is still to be done. It is also a cause of growing concern to business, as we have seen in the last couple of weeks, and there is still no agreement on the backstop to prevent the return of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Today's European Council was once billed as a “make or break” meeting on the Irish border, on which progress would be needed to keep the negotiations on track, but that does not seem likely either now.

If there is no agreement until November or the end of the year, that will leave even less time for Parliament properly to scrutinise the proposed deal and to put in place the required legislation by March 2019—and, of course, we are not the only Parliament that must approve the agreement. As the Committee heard from Guy Verhofstadt MEP last week, the European Parliament needs three months in which to consider and give its consent to the agreement before the EU can conclude it. He said that the Parliament must receive the deal by the end of this year, or it will not have enough time to vote on it by March next year.

Then we come to the meaningful vote in the House. If we approve the agreement, matters can progress, but what if we choose to place some conditions on our approval? What if we reject the agreement? What if the European Parliament rejects it? The Secretary of State has previously said that the House of Commons voting down the deal would mean the UK leaving without a deal, but the Committee does not accept that.

In considering an amendable motion, the House of Commons would have the opportunity to make its reasoning clear in any decision to reject the agreement or to place conditions on it. In such circumstances, the House would surely expect the Government to take full account, to seek to re-enter negotiations if required, and then to come back to the House with a further motion. That is why we say in our report that it is important for Parliament to be able to express its view clearly and advise the Government on how to proceed. The Government would then need to return to the House with any renegotiated text and resubmit the motion, because they cannot introduce the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill until Parliament approves the agreement.

The Committee remains concerned that the looming deadline of March next year leaves very little room for manoeuvre. We call on the Government to publish details of their intended legislative timetable, the publication dates of any White or Green Papers, and any contingency

plans for handling a no-deal outcome. We reiterate the recommendation in our third report that the Government should be prepared to seek a limited extension to the article 50 period in the event that substantive aspects of the future relationship remain to be agreed, or if there is a lack of parliamentary consent to the withdrawal agreement, or if there is no deal. However, we do recognise that it is by no means certain that the EU would respond positively to such a request.

Finally, I turn to the negotiations on the future relationship. Assuming that a withdrawal agreement and political declaration is concluded, we will have only 21 months from the date of our withdrawal to the end of the transition period in December 2020 in which to turn a political declaration into legal text on the future relationship and for such a treaty—and it could be more than one treaty—to be ratified. I think we all know that the negotiators will be dealing with a task that is frankly unparalleled in its scope and complexity and in the detail that will be required. There is a possibility that this will prove insufficient time to do all that work. We therefore call on the Government to seek that a mechanism be put into the withdrawal agreement for the extension of the transition period if that is required. We also call on the Government to ensure that Parliament is given a meaningful vote on the final text of the agreement with the EU that will cover the UK-EU relationship in the years ahead.

The report says:

“The debate on the motion for approval of the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration will be one of the most significant parliamentary debates in a generation.”

We all want to do that moment justice, and I hope that our report will assist the House in doing precisely that.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Steve Baker): The Government are pleased to welcome the statement made by the Chairman of the Exiting the EU Committee. The Government extend our thanks to the members of the Committee for the time and consideration that they have invested in producing this report and in reflecting on the issues that the Chairman has so ably and clearly set out. I look forward to reading the report and assure the Committee and the House that a Government response will be forthcoming in the usual way.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I thank the Select Committee Chair for his statement and for his heroic efforts to reach consensus when at times that is never going to be possible. I also endorse wholeheartedly his gratitude for the efforts of the Committee staff, who have done a fantastic job in serving the Committee.

Paragraph 17 of the report points out that Parliament currently has a role in scrutinising any EU external agreements, including trade agreements. As things stand, when we start to negotiate trade deals on our own, there is no such role for Parliament in scrutinising those deals. Is the report saying that as a result of Brexit, the important parliamentary scrutiny of trade deals will be less than it is just now?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman, who is a valued member of the Select Committee, has raised a very important point that is highlighted in the report. It is clear, leaving Brexit to one side, that there is growing

wish on the part of this Parliament, and Parliaments across Europe and around the world, to have a say in approving trade deals that may be negotiated in future, because they increasingly have an impact on many aspects of our national life. It is important, as we say in the report, that Parliament can have a meaningful vote on the future trade deal that we have with the European Union when the negotiations are concluded—in time, we hope, for the end of the transition period. We also highlight the fact that it is important that Parliament is able to scrutinise any future trade deals properly, whether they are negotiated by the European Union on our behalf because we end up remaining in the customs union—the Committee has not reached a view on that issue, but it is a matter of debate in the House—or they are negotiated by the Government.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on bringing his report to the House and giving an oral statement. I hope that he does the same for all his subsequent reports. Clearly, he and his Committee are going to be very busy, especially from October onwards. What is his response to a scenario whereby either the European Parliament or the British Parliament sought to amend the withdrawal agreement while the other had approved it? What happens in those circumstances?

Hilary Benn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. We feel pretty busy already. I cannot promise that I will always make a statement on every one of our reports, because that is in the hands of the Backbench Business Committee.

The scenario that the hon. Gentleman describes is a possibility. It is not unknown in negotiations where two parties are discussing an agreement for them to report back to their members—in this case, Members of the European Parliament and Members of the House of Commons—and then return to the table and say, “I’m sorry but it didn’t go down terribly well with the members in this respect. Can we talk about what we are going to do about this?” It is possible that that situation might arise. That is why we thought it important to set out in the report what we think ought to happen. We say that Parliament should be able to express its view—that we in Parliament should be able to offer advice—and the Government should listen to that, but clearly it would be for the Government to go back and negotiate.

This also links to the recommendation about an amendable motion. When the Secretary of State came to give evidence, I asked him, “Will the motion to approve the withdrawal agreement be amendable”, and he indicated that it would be. I think he said, “Show me a motion that can’t be”; I paraphrase. In those circumstances, Parliament might want to say, “The whole thing’s fine”, or it might want to say, “All these bits are okay but we have reservations about this, or we’d like to see that included.” My personal view is that Parliament should be entitled to do that. The view of the Committee is that Parliament should be able to offer advice to the Government and then the Government will have to respond. If the agreement is not approved—or if conditions are put on its approval—in the House, any Government, in any circumstances, on either side of the negotiations, would have to reflect on that and work out what they were going to do.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): May I ask my right hon. Friend about the section of the report dealing with the financial settlement, from paragraph 58 onwards? The House and the country have been given the impression that we are going to make a very large payment of up to €40 billion to the European Union on condition that we secure a favourable agreement about our future trading relationship. How likely is it that next March we will find ourselves obligated under the terms of the withdrawal agreement, which will be legally binding, to make the payment, yet at that point have no legal certainty at all about our future trading relationship?

Hilary Benn: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question and for his sterling service on the Committee. That is indeed a possibility due to the way that the draft withdrawal agreement is constructed at the moment. The commitment to pay the outstanding moneys that we owe, which the Government have accepted, is part of that agreement and not conditional on what may transpire in the negotiations on the future partnership. There has been some debate on this subject; indeed, we questioned Ministers on it when they appeared before the Committee. We say in the report:

“We note that the Government has not yet secured a clause in the Withdrawal Agreement linking the financial settlement to the satisfactory conclusion of negotiations on the framework for the future relationship. We call on the Government to confirm whether the inclusion of such a clause is one of its negotiating objectives.”

We wait to see what the Government say in response. As things stand at the moment, the commitment has been made to pay the money as part of the withdrawal agreement, and it is not linked to the future partnership and the treaty negotiations on that, which we hope will be concluded by December 2020.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I thank the Chair and members of the Exiting the EU Committee for today’s statement and their excellent report. The Committee I chair, the Health and Social Care Committee, has been very concerned about what could happen, in the event of no deal, to the future supply of medicines and devices because of the challenges to the supply chain. Will the Chair of the Committee set out in what other areas he is seeing concerns about the lack of contingency planning being published so that we can scrutinise what is happening and prepare for the future?

Hilary Benn: Ministers have said to us that work is going on to prepare for the possibility of no deal. The Committee has previously expressed its view that a no deal outcome would be very damaging to the British economy and create a great deal of uncertainty. That is why we say in the report that we do not accept that a rejection of the deal will then automatically lead to us leaving with no deal, because it would be for Parliament, in the end, to decide whether it was prepared to leave the European Union with no deal. That would be a matter for every single one of us as Members.

I think the nearer we get to March 2019, the more there will be concern if the possibility of no deal being agreed becomes greater than it is at present. I still hope and believe that agreement will be reached because, frankly, neither side in this negotiation should contemplate with any equanimity the prospect of leaving with no deal. The consequences would be exceedingly serious, as we learned from the evidence we heard from the Port

of Dover when we visited it, in terms of practical things like keeping the lorries flowing, never mind the medicines, never mind aircraft, never mind broadcasting rights, never mind data transfer. There is a very long list of questions on which people know how the system works today and they want to know how it will work once we have left, but they are very worried about what would happen if there were no deal, and my own personal view—I have expressed it in the House before—is that that is not something we should contemplate at all.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and thank him for his forbearance in what is sometimes a very robust discussion in Committee; he is certainly masterful in seeking consensus.

The question is really around the vote in October and the content of the political declaration on the framework for the future relationship. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a real risk of a wishy-washy, vague, motherhood-and-apple-pie political declaration in an attempt to keep the Conservative party together, rather than giving MPs a clear sense of the direction our future relationship would take? What steps does he think the Government should take to assure the House that there will be sufficient detail in that political declaration to make a meaningful vote truly meaningful?

Hilary Benn: I thank my hon. Friend for his work on the Committee. I hope he will forgive me if I do not comment on party considerations in making this statement here today, but he raises an important issue about the nature of the political declaration. We heard clearly in evidence that it will not be a treaty or draft treaty, although there was some debate when we heard from Guy Verhofstadt about whether including it as an annexe to the agreement would give it greater force. It will come down to this question: will the House think there is sufficient certainty about the nature of our future relationship on all the things I mentioned a moment ago to the Chair of the Select Committee on Health, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), in the political declaration or not? If we approve it and there is not that certainty, the House will really be saying, “Well, let’s see what happens.”

There are two parts to this negotiation: the withdrawal agreement, which is the divorce settlement, and which is important, and our future relationship on trade, security, the fight against terrorism, foreign policy and services—80% of the British economy is services—which is the really important bit. Therefore, the more detail and the more certainty the political declaration can offer, and the more the parties to the negotiation can show they are committed to turning that into a treaty, the better it will be for Parliament as it makes its judgment.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his report and his very informative statement. He alluded in his comments to having some frustrations about the speed of negotiations, and attributed that not just to this side of the channel but also to the other side. Does he agree that it is time for Brussels to move aside the politics and to start thinking about the economic interests of its citizens, and to move forward in a more constructive fashion with the negotiations?

Hilary Benn: That is not directly covered in the report, but I will give the hon. Gentleman a personal view, since he asks me the question. It is going to take two to reach an agreement, and I have already made the following point publicly as Chair of the Select Committee. The Government have their red lines, and in some respects they have already turned a slightly pinker shade, for example when the Prime Minister very sensibly said, “We want to continue to co-operate on security and recognise that that will involve the remit of the European Court of Justice,” and the same has been said in respect of the agencies. In my view, the EU negotiators should not then fold their arms and say, “That’s all very difficult”; they should say, “Fine, but you’re going to have to contribute financially and accept the rules, and you won’t have a vote although you might be in the room, and you’ll have to accept any judgments made by the ECJ.” Let us consider, for example, the European Aviation Safety Authority: it is patently sensible from everybody’s point of view that we should continue to be part of it, and I think there has been one ECJ judgment in the past three years on a very technical matter.

We hear a lot about cherry-picking, too. We looked carefully in our previous report at all the different deals the EU has negotiated—with Norway, the European economic area, Ukraine, Switzerland, Canada and so on—and it could be said that all of them involve elements of cherry-picking. One person’s cherry-picking is another person’s bespoke agreement. Speaking personally, I hope there is movement on both sides, because it seems to me that that is essential if we are going to get a sensible deal for British business and the British people.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I thank the Select Committee Chair for his statement and all the work undertaken by the Committee members. I welcome the conclusion that the Government should also commit to seeking the views of the devolved Parliaments as part of the process of seeking approval for the withdrawal Act and political declaration. Has the Select Committee taken evidence or come to any view as to whether the Joint Ministerial Committee has been an effective consultation forum previously?

Hilary Benn: We have taken some evidence previously on that question, and clearly there is currently a difficulty in respect of the withdrawal Act between the UK Government and the Scottish Government about how the powers that will come back will be used and by whom, and I hope very much that that is resolved. One of our report’s recommendations states:

“The Government should set out in detail the processes by which the views of the devolved governments and parliaments will be fed into the negotiations on the UK’s future relationship with the EU and on future trade agreements with non-EU states”, depending on where we end up in terms of trading arrangements.

The view has been expressed to us in the past that previously there were gaps between meetings of the Committee. It is my understanding that there have been more meetings more recently, but that does not necessarily result in a unanimity of view on what is the right thing to do. My advice, in so far as it is asked for, is “If you’ve got a difference of view, it is a jolly good idea to sit around the table and try and work it out.”

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his Committee on an excellent report. He mentioned that there are only 21 months after the end of March next year for the so-called implementation and transition period; in fact, the report points out that there will be European Parliament elections and a new Commission and the real time for real negotiation in that period will be about 15 months. Is he confident that the Government are aware of this, and does he expect a response from the Government within two months, as is customary, to this House, so that we can look at these issues in detail before the autumn?

Hilary Benn: On my hon. Friend’s last point, the Committee does indeed hope and expect that it will receive a response from the Government in the allotted time. We have produced a number of reports, and I think there might be one report on which we are still awaiting a response, but, in fairness to Ministers, they have got a lot on. I see that the Minister smiles, and I am in my most generous mood today: they have indeed got a lot on. I am sure Ministers understand the dynamics of the change in the EU come next year, with the elections and the new Commission being formed, although to be absolutely fair, when we asked Guy Verhofstadt about this last week, as I recall, he expressed the view that he did not really think that would create a great difficulty, but we have heard different evidence from other people.

What I would say is that whether that causes the time to be truncated or not, 21 months to sort out the whole list of things that we are all aware of, and Ministers are more aware of than anybody else, is not very long bearing in mind that the other bit of the process is ratification at the end of it. To the extent that an agreement reached becomes a mixed agreement, the ratification process—unlike the withdrawal agreement, for which the process is the Council by qualified majority voting, this Parliament, the European Parliament—would involve the Parliaments of all of the member states, including regional Parliaments, and we all recall what the Parliament of Wallonia did for about three weeks in respect of the Canada trade deal. So that adds to the uncertainty and to the pressure to try to get these negotiations concluded as quickly as possible.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that suggestions of an extension of any transition period are likely to be welcomed by many sectors of our economy? In the past few weeks, businesses have lined up to express their concern about the time available to provide business continuity and to safeguard jobs.

Hilary Benn: I suspect that that is the case. Why did the Government eventually seek a transitional period? They did so because we all agreed that falling off the edge of a cliff in March next year without an agreement was not sensible for the economy. Picking up on the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) raised a moment ago, if we have not been able to conclude all the details of a treaty or treaties on the future partnership during the transitional period, what would be the logic of then falling off a cliff 21 months later? There is none. My own view is that it is increasingly likely that there will have to be a further transition period, because we are running out of time.

[Hilary Benn]

Let us take as an example the customs arrangements that the Cabinet is currently discussing. I think it is pretty clear that even if it reached agreement on one or other of them, there might not be time to get all of that implemented before the end of December 2020. The indications that I have seen suggest that that might not be possible. If it is not possible, or if it is not possible to reach an agreement, it clearly makes sense to extend the transition period. For that to happen, however, there has to be a clause in the withdrawal agreement to allow for such an extension. The last thing we want is to end up, in December 2020, with everyone agreeing that it would be sensible to have a bit more time, only for someone to say, "I'm really sorry, but this agreement doesn't allow for that, so you're out on your ear with whatever you're holding at the time." And that is not in the interests of the United Kingdom, is it?

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Paragraph 19, and the right hon. Gentleman himself, has referred to the need for procedures to consult the devolved Governments on free trade deals with Europe, and indeed with non-EU countries. He has referred to the current little disagreement between Governments and Parliaments. In view of the importance of this for devolved areas and for premium Scottish products and businesses, does he think that the devolved Governments should have a place at the table when trade deals are being negotiated?

Hilary Benn: I grappled with this question when I was Environment Secretary. I would talk to my opposite number, Richard Lochhead, and he would sometimes come to Brussels and we would discuss the matter in question beforehand. However, the position always was, and remains to this day, that it is the United Kingdom as one country that is negotiating. Of course, in doing that, the United Kingdom should take account of the interests and needs of businesses in different sectors and different parts of the country, and of the particular products that the hon. Lady has referred to. As far as the current difficulty is concerned, as I observed when we had a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland recently, there is agreement on both sides that there are 24 areas on which the two sides need to sit down and talk. I hope that that process can unfold soon and reach agreement, because if agreement can be reached on the 24 areas, there should not be a difference of principle, because this has been done by means of negotiation.

Privilege

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): The Leader of the House has tabled a motion on the matter of privilege, which Mr Speaker has agreed should take precedence today. I call the Leader of the House to move the motion.

1.3 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): I beg to move,

That this House notes that the Order of the House of Thursday 7 June has not been complied with; and accordingly refers the matter to the Committee of Privileges.

As I said during the debate on 7 June, the Select Committees of this House do vital work. The Government strongly support the independence of the Select Committee system. The House resolved on 7 June:

"That this House takes note of the Third Special Report of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee",

and an Order of the House was agreed that Mr Dominic Cummings

"give an undertaking to the Committee, no later than 6pm on 11 June 2018, to appear before that Committee at a time on or before 20 June 2018".—[*Official Report*, 7 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 492.]

That order has not been complied with. In accordance with traditional practice, it is for the Leader of the House to bring forward a motion when matters of privilege are in question, in order to facilitate a decision of the House. I therefore responded to Mr Speaker's letter yesterday to confirm that I was seeking to raise this issue as a matter of privilege.

My letter followed the Order of the House of 7 June, and the decision of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), to report the non-compliance to the House by means of a vote entry on 20 June. I also understand that my hon. Friend has consulted colleagues and that there is broad support from members of the Liaison Committee for this matter now to be referred to the Committee of Privileges. I reaffirm today the Government's respect for the privileges of the House of Commons and our commitment to continue to uphold them, and I therefore commend this motion to the House.

1.5 pm

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House for bringing forward this motion today. As she said, this process was initiated by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee as a consequence of Dominic Cummings' refusal to appear in front of the Committee when invited to do so and when a formal request had been issued by the Committee. When the House passed the motion on 7 June, this ceased to be a dispute between Dominic Cummings and the individual Select Committee and became a dispute between him and the whole House of Commons. He has refused to comply with a motion of this House to appear before a Select Committee. That motion expressed the will not just of me as Chair of the Committee and of the members of that Committee but of the whole of the House of Commons, which supported the motion.

These are incredibly serious matters. It is quite something when an individual decides that their judgment should be set above that of the democratically elected Parliament

of this country, and that they have the right to disregard a motion of this House and to decide if and when they should give evidence to a Select Committee of the House and on what terms. That is unacceptable. For most people in this country, it would never get to that stage because they accept an invitation to appear before a Select Committee, and even if there are sometimes disputes about the date or the time involved, they decide to come. Anyone who holds a position of public trust—be they the holder of a public post in government or a public authority, or the leader of a company who is accountable to shareholders, investors or a broader group of stakeholders—can see that responding to a request from Parliament to explain their actions or those of their organisation is part and parcel of their job. That convention has been established, and it is increasingly important to the work of the Select Committees, whose job is not simply to hold Government Ministers to account but to pursue inquiries that are of public interest.

Our inquiry into disinformation and fake news threw up some important and serious issues that we wanted to talk to Dominic Cummings about. In some ways, however, this is not about our inquiry or the work of our individual Committee; it is about the right of Parliament to issue requests for people to give evidence to its Committees and for those requests to be complied with. The Committee of Privileges will now consider not only the conduct of Dominic Cummings and the way in which he declined our request but also the general contempt with which he treated the Committee in correspondence when he was engaging with us.

What should the rights of the House be when someone refuses to respond to a motion of the House regarding their giving evidence to a Committee? What sanctions should be applied? I believe that there has to be a final sanction—a final backstop. It is probably not for elected

politicians in the House of Commons to be issuing fines and summonses or setting penalties or punishments for non-compliance, but there has to be a next step. There has to be some kind of sanction for someone who has been blatant in their behaviour and their language and in the contempt that they have shown for Parliament. This serious matter has now been referred to the Committee of Privileges, and this is bigger than just considering the response to Dominic Cummings; it now involves a wider consideration of the powers of the House when we are put in a situation such as this.

1.9 pm

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Is it not supremely telling that someone who based the whole of their Brexit campaign on the sovereignty of this place has treated it with such contempt? As the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) says, there must be proper sanctions when dealing with contempt of this seriousness.

1.9 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): We had a very good discussion about this issue at the Liaison Committee; I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) about the supreme irony: that the mastermind of the leave campaign, whose sole *raison d'être* was all about parliamentary sovereignty and taking back control, should be turning his back on this place in a show of arrogance and contempt that cannot go unmarked or unpunished.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes that the Order of the House of Thursday 7 June has not been complied with; and accordingly refers the matter to the Committee of Privileges.

Backbench Business

Improving Air Quality

[Relevant documents: Tenth Special Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Seventh Special Report of the Environmental Audit Committee, Second Special Report of the Health and Social Care Committee and Third Special Report of the Transport Committee, Improving air quality: Government response to the Fourth Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Fourth Report of the Environmental Audit Committee, Third Report of the Health and Social Care Committee, and Second Report of the Transport Committee, HC 1149.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I suggest that we work on the basis of 15 minutes for opening speeches and 10 minutes for speeches thereafter.

1.10 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Joint Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Environmental Audit, Health and Social Care and Transport Committees, Improving Air Quality, HC 433, and calls on the Government to adopt its recommendations as part of its Clean Air Strategy.

I very much back speakers on the previous motion in their points about contempt of Parliament when people refuse to give evidence to Select Committees.

I am grateful to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to the Liaison Committee and to the Backbench Business Committee for granting time in this House to debate our report on improving air quality. I thank my fellow Chairs and members of the Health, Transport and Environmental Audit Committees for all their work and help; I also thank the many staff across all the Committees for helping put together the four-Committee report, which is a challenging task.

Last October, we launched a joint inquiry to consider the Government's most recent plans for reducing levels of nitrogen dioxide. The cross-cutting inquiry examined whether the Government's plans to cut air quality pollution were adequate. We have concluded that they are not. The UK has failed to meet our legal air quality limits since 2010, and successive Governments have failed to get a grip and improve our air quality. Air pollution is a silent killer. It is the largest environmental risk to public health, costing the UK an estimated £20 billion every year in health impacts. Air pollution affects everyone, from those driving their cars to those who walk or cycle to work—especially in the many hotspots in our inner cities.

I am not saying that the Government have failed to take any action. It is good to see that they have taken on board key recommendations in our joint report, including: consolidating the patchwork of air quality legislation; developing a personal air pollution alert system for the public; making better use of air quality data from local authorities; and making sure that those data are compatible with each other. I also very much welcome the commitments in the latest clean air strategy consultation to cut levels of particulate pollution.

Although those initial steps are welcome, they are not nearly enough. Real change requires bold, meaningful actions, which are absent from the Government's current approach. In our report, we called for a properly resourced national support scheme to help councils struggling with air pollution. Such a scheme would require far greater cross-departmental working and joint planning—something that, as we highlighted, is severely lacking right now. In addition, we recommended a “polluter pays” clean air fund.

This is not a war on motorists. We envisioned that the fund would be paid for by the automobile industry. I do not want to punish those who bought diesel vehicles that had been recommended by previous Governments; they bought in good faith and will need time and support to rectify the mistakes and recommendations of those previous Governments. I urge the Government to re-examine their decision not to have a targeted diesel scrappage scheme.

Furthermore, we need significant efforts to speed up the roll-out of electric charging infrastructure, which must include more rapid charging points to accelerate the transition to low-emission vehicles across all our towns and cities. It is essential that people should be able not only to charge up their cars, but to do so quickly, otherwise we will not get enough people into electric cars. All that requires a new clean air Act to update and streamline existing legislation. The new legislation could also include measures to ensure that the Government are held to account on environmental issues once we have left the EU. A new clean air Act is absolutely essential, and I ask the Minister today to confirm the timescale for the introduction of such an Act.

I find it disappointing that the Government are not making the automobile industry pay for the damage it has caused. We have already been let down in this regard: when we did not get anywhere near enough compensation out of Volkswagen for the emissions scandal. I am amazed that the German Government were able to get €1 billion, while all we seem to have got are the zeros. The automobile industry has a yearly turnover of some £80 billion.

In recent tests, the majority of the latest 2017 diesel cars are almost four times above the EU's baseline emissions limit.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I come back to my hon. Friend's point about Volkswagen and Germany. Would it not be ironic and extremely unfortunate if the German car industry used that €1 billion to leapfrog into clean new-energy vehicles that put them at a competitive advantage, given that there has been no similar payment that could help the UK motor industry?

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend makes a really good point. I am amazed: do British lawyers lack teeth? Do Government lawyers lack any sort of drive and ambition? It is not just Volkswagen; others out there could also contribute. If we got funds from them, those could help towards producing cleaner vehicles or helping with air quality in our inner cities and hotspots across the country. It seems so ridiculous to lose that form of money and funding.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman not find it extraordinary that the US Department of Justice and the state of California have brought a case against Volkswagen, which has had to pay out more than \$4 billion in the United States, with six people having been indicted, yet the UK Government are being brought to the European Court of Justice for our complete inertia in tackling this criminality?

Neil Parish: The hon. Lady, a fellow Select Committee Chair, raises a very good point. What I cannot understand is that although the money is not exactly free, it is money we could get from a source separate from British taxpayers, or wherever, to help to clean up a situation created by these vehicles. I urge the Minister today to come forward with ideas about how we can get some money from the car industry, especially Volkswagen; as the hon. Lady says, the Americans seem to be somewhat more effective at that job than we are.

The “polluter pays” fund would mean that the Government could have more money available to improve public transport and speed up the roll-out of infrastructure needed for low-emission vehicles. The emissions scandal showed us that all the manufacturers were prepared to put profit above everything else, including our health, but the Government are shying away from making them pay.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that such a fund could also be used to build infrastructure for those who walk or cycle—for active transport?

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend, who chairs the Health and Social Care Committee, makes a good point. Once we have the money, there are limitless things we can do with it. The unfortunate fact is that we do not have the money at the moment. I think the Government have felt that. Walking, cycling and altering the way we go about our daily lives is all good. It is good for our health, and it gets us out of our cars.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that money would be well spent because, if we succeed in getting more people on to their bicycles or walking, it will deliver long-term savings both to physical healthcare and mental healthcare and create better communities?

Neil Parish: The hon. Lady, who chairs the Transport Committee, is absolutely right that the money would be well spent. Our health would be improved, and therefore we would save money on the NHS and we would be able to spend the money in other ways.

Why are there private individuals in this country who are prepared to bring a case against VW, yet we, as a Government, have singly failed? I would be interested if the Minister could give us some insight into why we allow private people, quite rightly, to bring a case, yet the Government are not supporting them and are not bringing a case themselves.

There is not a satisfactory system for overseeing how money is spent to improve our air quality. Our report finds that Departments are clearly failing to work together. The Government have promised some

modest improvements, and I am sure the House looks forward to an update on that in the very near future, perhaps even today.

The Government response tells us that a consistent approach was taken to appraising the cost of air pollution, yet during our joint Committee hearings I was deeply concerned to learn that the then Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), was not even aware of how much economic impact air pollution has on the UK.

It is clear that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Treasury, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Transport, the Department of Health and Social Care and local authorities not only need to collaborate more effectively but need to collaborate, full stop.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Does that not bring us to probably the single most important point we will touch on this afternoon, which is the need for health and wellbeing to be included in all policies and the need for us to get out of all the different silos?

Neil Parish: I could not agree more with the hon. Lady. Not only on air quality but in food policy and agriculture policy, health needs to be considered; it needs to be considered in all these things. This can be a beacon for the way forward, but we need much more co-operation between all parts of Government and local government. We would all agree that we have to be careful that the Government do not blame local government and that local government does not blame the Government.

The Government have told us that the Green Book guidance sets out what Departments should be doing and how they should be working together, but that has clearly not worked in the past, and we have received nothing to give us confidence that it will necessarily improve. Perhaps the Minister will be able to put me right.

The clean air strategy failed to include measures to improve road transport emissions. Emissions are being dealt with in a separate strategy, which demonstrates that the Government still operate in silos. I had hoped the Government would take more substantive measures to improve cross-departmental working.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making some interesting points about the public purse and joined-up thinking between Departments. He says that road emissions are not included in the clean air strategy. Does he have any comment on aviation? Does he agree with some of us on this side that it seems lamentable that, when 9,000 Londoners a year are dying from toxic air, we have just taken a decision to approve the expansion of Heathrow airport? Willie Walsh, from the parent company of British Airways, said the decision is outrageous—he actually called it BS, but I will not repeat that word here because it is unparliamentary. He said that the cost does not stack up.

Neil Parish: I understand the hon. Lady's concern, but I will not venture into the airport air pollution problem. A lot of the air quality, certainly on the

[Neil Parish]

ground, has a lot to do with the extra traffic going in and out of the terminals. That also has to be dealt with. There is a lot to be done, but I do not want to get into a huge debate about the runway at Heathrow.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Neil Parish: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, whom I consider to be my hon. Friend.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I commend the hon. Gentleman for being wise in not going down the route of debating Heathrow again. More Opposition Members supported the Heathrow national policy statement on Monday than opposed it.

Neil Parish: I welcome my hon. Friend's statement. I will not venture further.

It is disappointing that these matters have not been addressed properly, but I look forward to the Minister's reply. It is also disappointing that the Government are not doing enough to support local authorities that are struggling with air quality. Local authorities face real funding restrictions. Although we said that councils need to

"take ownership of delivering local solutions to local problems" there is the question of whether it is possible to reduce air pollution significantly across the country without our national Government looking at the big picture. The existing mechanisms are not delivering the results we need.

I welcome the Government's commitment to improving the amount of information and best practice sharing available to local authorities, but the change that is so necessary for struggling local authorities will not be achieved without substantial funding increases. That funding needs to be ring-fenced.

The High Court ruled against the 2017 NO₂ plan because it was too narrow. Since then, DEFRA has instructed an additional 33 local authorities to address NO₂ breaches. So far, only £1.65 million has been allocated to support those local authorities. I am sure the House will agree that that is clearly woefully inadequate, Mr Deputy Speaker. [Laughter.] Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. You changed very quickly.

We would like to see a properly resourced national support scheme for local authorities. The Government have said they might consider the additional funding requirements. I urge the Minister to make a clear statement of intent.

I am pleased to have had this opportunity to raise these issues, and I hope the House will give the Minister the oomph he needs to go away and ensure that the respective Departments heed our Committees' joint work. The Government must grab the bull by the horns, make firm in their clean air strategy proposal and introduce a clean air Act.

1.27 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), and I look forward to the

speeches by my fellow Select Committee Chairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) and the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston).

I am afraid that this is a rather sorry tale of inaction and buck passing. Fault lies not with one party but with successive Governments. The efforts so far have been inadequate and have been characterised by a lack of urgency. We know the problems that poor air quality causes. It affects our health and our environment and, as has already been said, as many as 40,000 people die prematurely each year as a result of poor air quality. The elderly, the unwell and the economically deprived are those most likely to be affected. The Government estimate that poor air quality costs the UK economy £27.5 billion a year.

We also know where the problem occurs. Key pollutants include nitrogen dioxide and fine particulate matter, known as PM_{2.5}. More than 85% of air quality zones in the UK—37 out of 43—exceeded EU nitrogen dioxide limits in 2016. They should have been compliant in 2010, and the Government think it will be 2026 before all 43 zones in the UK are compliant. The World Health Organisation tells us there is no safe level of exposure to fine particulate matter.

We know what causes poor air quality. It comes from several sources: industry, agriculture, homes, businesses and transport. Progress has been made, but it is stalling, and we are in breach of our legal obligations. Road transport is responsible for about 80% of nitrogen oxide concentrations at places in the UK that exceed legal limits, with diesel engines a significant contributor. The number of cars and vans on our roads continues to rise, and congestion has worsened, which increases pollution in itself. Although diesel cars have become less popular since the VW scandal was uncovered in 2015, for more than a decade before that the trend was in the opposite direction.

Transport also generates a significant proportion of particulate matter, from both combustion, and wear on tyres and brake pads. The Government have largely relied on cleaner vehicles to solve the problem, and limits on emissions, which are gradually tightened with each iteration of the euro standards, have helped us make some progress but not enough. Real world emissions have not fallen as promised, and renewing the fleet could take 15 years or more. Policies to accelerate this process, such as scrappage schemes, may be needed. The science, historical evidence and impact are clear, but we still have not taken the action that is needed. Three times the Government's strategy has been found wanting by the courts, and the UK faces large fines by the EU Commission, along with other countries, for not bringing air quality within legal limits. We know the solutions that are needed, so it is shocking that successive Governments have failed to take the necessary action.

Nationally and locally there are examples of good things happening. In my own city there has been considerable investment in public transport, with major extensions to our tram network, and that was supported by the coalition Government. Last year, Nottingham's municipal bus company introduced new biogas buses, and work has begun to retrofit its entire fleet of diesel buses by autumn 2019. Last week, on Clean Air Day, the city council launched an anti-idling campaign, mirroring similar action in other towns and cities across the UK. As I have said, the Department for Transport has

supported the development of low emission buses and taxis, has regulated maritime emissions, is supporting low emission vehicles and alternative fuels, and has led work on the development of real driving emissions standards.

So what has gone wrong—why have we not solved this problem? The first issue we found in this regard was collaboration. That is not a problem that can be fixed by central Government or local government alone—they need to work together. At present, action is too fragmented, lacks clear leadership, and is not properly costed or resourced. There are no fiscal measures that support long-term behaviour change in a meaningful way. Local authorities are already responsible for meeting air quality limits but find it difficult to make changes, partly due to lack of resources, but partly because the changes needed are politically unpalatable. Our joint Select Committee report called for ambitious, co-ordinated, cross-departmental action. Sadly, the Government's new draft strategy says almost nothing about emissions from cars, and we are still waiting for the Department to publish its strategy "Road to Zero". That simply does not seem very joined-up.

It is vital that we encourage the uptake of clean technologies and remove the most polluting vehicles from our roads, but the Government rejected a more ambitious target for ending the sale of petrol and diesel cars before 2040. Today, Lord Deben, chair of the Committee on Climate Change, echoed our call in the drive to meet targets on carbon emissions. There are rumours that the "Road to Zero" will water down the commitment to end sales of diesel and petrol cars even further, and I hope that this latest intervention will prompt Ministers to think again.

The Government also need to accelerate the switch to ultra low emission vehicles, and that requires a network of charging points, particularly for rapid charging, and a strategy for on-street residential charging.

Dr Huq: Does my hon. Friend agree that in London we have made significant progress, with the current Mayor bringing forward the ultra low emission zone and with the proposed toxicity charge? However, sadly, a lot of this seems to have been undermined by this week's decision—I know she voted the right way—to have an extra runway in Heathrow. People in west London are lamenting that, and I regret that a lot of the good work in her report was ignored by the Government's national policy statement.

Lilian Greenwood: I thank my hon. Friend. She rightly says that a lot of work has been done in London, yet it still faces a huge challenge on air quality. That is one reason why our Select Committee report on the airports NPS calls for extra safeguards on air quality. Obviously, Parliament did vote for the NPS and the Secretary of State has now designated it, but it is essential he keeps his promises on air quality.

It is also vital that the public sector leads, demonstrating what is possible. The Government could set dates by which their car fleet will all be ULEVs. Local authorities, the NHS and other large public bodies could do the same with their fleets. It is not just on road transport where the Government are less ambitious than they might be. The decision to row back from electrification of our railways in favour of bi-mode trains has worrying

implications for air quality, carbon emissions and noise. Of course, our Committee has also published a report on rail investment today. Those look more like decisions taken in isolation than decisions taken under the umbrella of an overarching strategy.

There is a danger that the Government rely too heavily on new technologies to solve our air quality challenges, placing too much emphasis on cleaning up road vehicles and not enough on reducing the number of vehicles on our roads. Improving public transport and encouraging active travel should lie at the heart of any clean air strategy. Our four committees concluded that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Transport must work closely with local authorities to ensure that councils introducing clean air zones receive the support they need to implement complementary measures that encourage car drivers to switch to public transport and active travel, as well as increasing the take-up of electric vehicles. Yet modal shift and active travel—walking and cycling—hardly get a mention in the Government's draft strategy.

Investment in low emission buses is great but the value of such investments is magnified if local authorities also take steps to encourage motorists to opt for buses rather than making journeys by car. The latest passenger statistics show that bus patronage is falling and rail passenger numbers are also down. It is too early to say whether that is a blip or the start of a trend, but the Government should be concerned. Is the policy response in line with the strategy the Government tell us they want to have? Well, not really—the cost of rail and bus travel are rising faster than the cost of motoring. The Government's own assumptions appear to show that, as things stand, they accept that their policies will not deliver a financial incentive to encourage or support modal shift. Without some action, whether on fuel duty or charging zones, efforts to tackle congestion or improve air quality are less likely to succeed. It would be helpful if the Government were to articulate more clearly than they have what they want to achieve on modal shift and how they will deliver that, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments today.

The Government also need to create a framework in which local authorities have the resources and powers they need to act. The new expectations on councils on air quality come at a time when they are already facing huge funding pressures. The Government must provide all local authorities breaching nitrogen dioxide limit levels with access to the financial resources they need to tackle them. Responsibility for providing those resources should not lie only with the public sector: following the principle that the polluter should pay, the private sector should be asked to contribute to a clean air fund. As hon. Members have said, Volkswagen and other car manufacturers that cheated emissions tests should be held to account. Our Select Committee has repeatedly raised this issue with Ministers and the lack of action is deeply disappointing.

Policies and action at local level also need supporting national policies and a public debate that makes it less difficult to implement things that may not be universally popular. Our ambitions for cleaner air, with the associated public health and environmental benefits, cannot succeed without action by local authorities, businesses and communities. The sustained improvements we have seen

[Lilian Greenwood]

in air quality in the past can be continued only if Government action—legislative, policy, taxation, and spending—is co-ordinated and working in tandem with other players. By failing to act in a joined-up way, the Government are not just undermining their air quality strategy; they are missing opportunities for synergies that would help deliver on other policy goals. For example, many of the policies needed to tackle urban congestion could also help to improve air quality, and tackling both could have a positive effect on the local and national economy. A significant increase in active travel could make a difference to policies on tackling obesity, improving mental health and building better communities. Action on air quality could help to reduce carbon emissions. The realisation of the wider benefits cannot be left to happen by chance.

Action on poor air quality is long overdue. There are things we can do—this is not a problem without a solution—but if the Government do not show leadership, nothing will change. We have passed the point where more of the same will do the job; the courts have made that clear. Bold, ambitious and innovative policies are needed to create the right framework for action—a framework within which national policies support and encourage the right kinds of action at a local level. The Government have launched a consultation on their clean air strategy, but its lack of focus on transport emissions looks complacent, falling well short of what we recommended in our joint report. I hope that Ministers will heed our calls today and redouble their efforts.

1.40 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): During the inquiry, we learned from Professor Holgate, the lead clinician from the Royal College of Physicians, that poor air quality is the second biggest cause of avoidable mortality in this country, after smoking. It cuts short some 40,000 lives a year, and we know from the British Heart Foundation and others that even a day's exposure to elevated levels of poor-quality air can increase the likelihood of a heart attack.

Were any of us to go into our local GP surgery, we would very likely see in the leaflet stands or on the walls information on helping us to reduce our alcohol consumption or to cut back smoking or give up altogether, and hopefully we would see some information on coming off illegal substances. All are public health risks that are well known and well understood, and information on them has reached the level of our local surgeries. I challenge any Member present to go into their local GP surgery and see what they can find about what to do about poor air quality, the second biggest cause of avoidable mortality in our country. We need to do more. GPs are under pressure and there is an awful lot that they need to do. We need education in the medical schools, we need the royal colleges to get on top of the issue and we need Public Health England to take a lead in this policy area. I shall say more about the latter shortly.

I occasionally feel that the issue of poor air quality is set up as a battle between the air-quality zealots on one side and on the other those who champion lower-income motorists and people struggling to get around in their ordinary lives. That is a completely false way to look at

the issue. Let us consider for a moment a woman who has to drive a van—probably a diesel van—for her living. She is often stuck in traffic but it is the only way that she can earn her living to put bread on the table for the children. It is possible that she lives near a busy road and her children go to a school that is also near a busy road. That lady needs to earn her living. She needs that van—it is probably the only van that she can get hold of to do her work—but at the same time her health is being damaged. So it is not about the people who are concerned about this issue on one side and on the other people who just see it as a bore from well-meaning busybodies who want to interfere and make their lives more difficult. It is a more nuanced and complicated issue than that. We have to help people to live their lives in an affordable manner so that they can earn their incomes without suffering huge damage to their health. I direct the House's attention to what the California Air Resources Board did with a targeted scheme to help people on lower incomes to move to cleaner and less polluting vehicles.

If one thing comes out of my speech today, for the House and anybody who may be listening to it outside this place, I want it to be the fact, which is almost unknown and unrecognised by the public, that people in their car are up to 10 times worse off in terms of the damage being done to their health than they are outside on the street. It is the complete opposite of what most of our constituents believe. They believe that if they are in their car with the air conditioning on, they are relatively protected from all the horrible fumes outside.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): I thank my political neighbour for giving way. I suffered from breathing fumes in traffic jams when driving my car on holiday. I did not know that my chest problems were to do with breathing fumes. The simple technique of making sure that when we use our air conditioning, we press the button that recirculates the air inside the car rather than drawing in polluted air from outside, is very important. It would be helpful if that information was given to people.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to my parliamentary neighbour for giving us that personal example of how he was affected.

I am afraid that the bad news does not stop there. Professor Holgate also told us that even in buses and taxis, for which researchers have done similar measurements, people are two to three times worse off than if they were walking on the street. Of course, we absolutely need to encourage more bus travel, hopefully in clean buses—perhaps electric or hydrogen-powered—but we have to look at how we travel around our big cities, particularly as we arrive in major towns, the traffic slows down and we all get stuck in it. If people knew the facts and were aware, there would be a demand: when people stood for the local council or for Parliament, they would be asked, “What are you going to do to help to make this issue better in my local area when you get on to the council?”, or “What is Parliament going to do about it?”

Mary Creagh: I passionately agree with the excellent points that the hon. Gentleman is making, but does he agree that we need fundamentally to rethink how we think of traffic? When people say that they are stuck in

traffic, they are traffic—they are part of the congestion. When I cycle to work in the mornings, I am not stuck in traffic because I am part of a cycling stream that is going around the people who are stuck in their vehicles. If we want cities where people can move and breathe, we need fundamentally to rethink what traffic looks like.

Andrew Selous: I completely agree with the hon. Lady. In another guise, I co-chair the all-party group on cycling, so I absolutely get the importance of cycling and walking. They are not just good for our health and do not just cut congestion and pollution, but are good for our mental health, helping us to socialise and build community. There are so many reasons why what the hon. Lady said is absolutely right.

Dr Whitford: My home is on the west coast of Scotland, where I am lucky to have incredibly clean air, but when I am down here I normally walk or cycle to Parliament. If anyone else present suffers from asthma, they will know what a bad winter I have had, almost continuously since last November. It is no good telling people to get on their bikes or to walk when that then exposes them. We need to deal with the traffic to allow safe cycling.

Andrew Selous: I could not agree more. As someone who over the Easter recess cycled from my home to my constituency office along the busy A5, with juggernauts going fairly close to me, I completely understand what the hon. Lady says. We need safe cycling, and all the evidence shows that more people will cycle if it is safer. That is especially true for children going to school from all the new housing developments. When we build new housing, it is essential that we have safe cycle routes to the schools. That will result in healthier children, less childhood obesity and better communities.

Let me go quickly through the full list of health problems associated with poor air quality. It includes: premature birth; reduction in foetal growth; low birth weight; increased risk of death during the first year of life, particularly from respiratory illnesses; exacerbation of the effects of respiratory infections in young children; and effects on the normal growth of lung function during childhood. There is really shocking evidence that if a child's lung capacity is damaged when it is young, it may never recover. From a social justice point of view, it is even worse, because it is the poorest kids who are breathing in the worst air. That is why this issue matters so much.

The list also includes cardiovascular disease, heart attacks, hypertension and stroke. Poor air quality also leads to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; pneumonia; accelerated decline in lung function and lung cancer in adulthood; the development of early onset asthma, which the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) mentioned just now, as well as exacerbating asthma in those already living with the condition; impaired cognition; dementia—a big Canadian study showed a link with dementia; and other neuro-degenerative disorders as well as type 2 diabetes, obesity and metabolic syndrome. I think that we can say that that is a pretty concerning list.

Public Health England is a very fine body, which I admire very greatly. Its chief executive, Duncan Selbie, does very good work, but we need more action from the organisation. It needs to be engaged in this issue. What

it has done so far has been quite high level and quite strategic; it has not really come down to the level of the citizen, which is where we need it to be active.

One recommendation of the joint report of the Select Committees was that Public Health England should deliver an effective and appropriate campaign by this September, but Public Health England has told us that that is not possible in the timescale. That is despite the fact that the World Health Organisation has called this issue a public health emergency. I ask PHE to redouble its efforts on this issue and really try to get this information down to local levels so that people are, first, informed and, secondly, know what they can do to protect themselves best, and to stop being part of the problem and to start contributing to the issue.

I was pleased to see in the foreword to the Government's 2018 clean air strategy, the statement by the Secretary of State that there would be a new goal that takes into account the World Health Organisation guidelines. There was also a commitment to primary legislation. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley), cares a lot about these matters. When he responds, could he please give us a little bit more detail on this issue? There are specific World Health Organisation guidelines on the amount of particulate matter—PM_{2.5}—that we should not exceed on a daily basis. When the Government talk about taking into account the guidelines, I hope that they will go into that level of detail, bearing in mind what I said about the briefing from the British Heart Foundation about the increased risk of heart attack from elevated exposure to poor air quality just within a 24-hour period.

Winter pressure in the national health service is a huge issue that concerns every single Member here and I know the national health service is taking it extremely seriously as we head towards next winter. I have just been in the Upper Waiting Hall speaking to Dr Hugh Coe from Manchester University as part of evidence week, which is a very welcome intervention, as the top academics and scientists who know about these issues take the time and trouble to come down to Parliament to brief Members so that we are properly informed and can make good decisions on these matters. Dr Hugh Coe confirmed what the clinical chair of Bedfordshire clinical commissioning group said to me quite recently, which was that part of the increase in winter pressures, much of which is caused by older people going into hospital with respiratory problems, is from poor air quality. When we have cold weather in winter, the air is clammy and a bit foggy, which means that the pollution gets stuck in it. We breathe it in. It affects us more as we breathe it in. The same happens when it is very hot in the summer because the sun exacerbates the pollution. Again, I do not think that it is well known that there is this link between poor air quality, higher levels of respiratory problems and the winter pressures that we are all concerned about—a further reason for action.

My final issue is how we energise this issue at a local level. The Government talk about monitoring levels of air quality around schools. I would add old people's homes as well. There are many other places where it is very important that we know the level of air quality. That information is really important to inform local residents, so that when they are looking to elect people

[Andrew Selous]

to public office, either to Parliament or to local authorities, they can let them know how seriously they take this issue and the fact that they want something to be done about it.

Finally, we had a meeting on air quality and active travel in my constituency not so long ago. An older lady who had never smoked and who had led a pretty healthy life came up to me and said, “I am here today. I have just been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Where did that come from?” She had never smoked. The chances were, I am afraid, that she got it from breathing in poor quality air. That will greatly affect the last years of her life. Sometimes we talk in statistics and percentages, but I want to end my contribution with that one lady and the impact on her remaining years.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Just a gentle reminder that if we stick to 10 minutes each, I will not have to impose a time limit. There is another debate to follow this one.

1.56 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will endeavour to stick to the time limit.

I join my colleagues in thanking the Liaison and Backbench Business Committees for granting us this debate. As we have heard, air pollution causes an estimated 40,000 early deaths each year. That is as much as is caused by alcohol. As the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) said in his speech—and it is a pleasure to follow on from him—we go to our GP surgery and we find out about obesity and tackling drug and alcohol problems, but there is no advice on air pollution, despite successive reports from different Committees. The Environmental Audit Committee, the predecessor Committee, looked at this issue back in 2011 and it was seen as almost a cranky thing to be considering—a bit weird, a bit strange and a bit eco-warriorish. The fact that we are now debating this on the Floor of the House shows the long period of education—both of the public and of parliamentarians—that has taken place in the seven years since then. We are now waking up to a public health emergency.

One hundred and seventy eight of those early deaths are in Wakefield. I urge Members to go up to the Upper Waiting Hall and look at the quality of the air in their constituencies. We are in the middle of a hot spell. It has not, as yet, been defined as a heatwave. People might think that it is a heatwave, but we have had the Met Office in. We are looking at heatwaves at the moment, so everything that the Environmental Audit Committee looks at suddenly becomes a big, interesting thing. The link between heatwaves and air pollution is very strong. One early piece of evidence that we have seen is that we will experience more excess deaths in future as our country and our planet warm, so this is something that we need to start thinking about.

We have heard about how the Government have failed successively in various air pollution plans to get this right. We should have met our targets back in 2010, and we have millions of people now living with illegally

high levels of air pollution, and we are back into the realms of plan A, plan B and plan C. It is a bit like Samuel Beckett said, “Fail again. Fail better.” The only reason why the Government are acting is because of European Union law, and now we are set to leave the EU. The Government are only accepting a post-Brexit watchdog because Parliament has demanded it. Again, that is something that my Committee is looking at. It is of absolutely prime importance that we have not just the air quality standards, but some enforcement mechanism after we leave.

Our Committees asked the National Audit Office—my Committee likes to audit things and we like to see the measurement, the numbers, the costs and the benefits—to investigate performance on air pollution. It found that 85% of air quality zones did not meet the EU’s nitrogen dioxide limits in 2016, and those zones are forecast to be in breach for another eight years—till 2026.

We talk a lot about transport. Transport is responsible for the concentration of nitrogen dioxide, but the NAO discovered in its forensic work that wood-burning stoves are responsible for 42% of all emissions across the country, and that agriculture is responsible for 80% of ammonia emissions. We must not focus only on urban transport; that is where the concentrations are, but we must also look at wood-burning stoves. I was very disappointed to hear the comments of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about banning “wood-burning Goves”—wood-burning stoves. We cannot afford to joke about this issue. We can act in a regulatory manner; it is possible to have low-emission stoves. We have to act in order to ensure that people are not buying something for their home that is going to sit there, belching out this stuff in the winter for the next 20 years. The cost of the health impacts of air pollution is £20 billion a year, which puts into context the costs of acting on this issue. The Government have until October to try again.

The main victims of air pollution are drivers and passengers. I went on Radio 5 Live to say this, and there was slight annoyance from some of the people who were phoning in. They were asking, “Why has no one told us to shut our air vents when we are sitting in our vehicles?” Professor Stephen Holgate told our inquiry how the placement of exhausts and ventilation systems means that

“you just vent the freshest, most toxic pollutants—the fumes coming right out of the tailpipe—straight into the car, to your child sitting in the back seat.”

For those of us who have pushed babies in buggies to school, they are also at tailpipe level. That means that the youngest, most vulnerable members of our communities—the ones with smaller lungs—are the ones breathing in the most of this stuff. As a community, we really need to think about this.

We have been looking at what happens with air quality targets if we leave the EU. Domestic legislation is not as strong and not taken as seriously as EU law, because EU law has the threat of fines behind it. The four Committees welcomed proposals to bring forward an environmental watchdog, but we said that it must have the powers

“to force the Government to act, otherwise action on air quality will be further weakened.”

The Government brought forward their proposals, but mentioned an advisory notice, which is effectively a watchdog with no teeth. Parliament has now stepped in.

The European Union (Withdrawal) Act requires the Government to bring forward a Bill in the next six months to create a body with enforcement powers. Next month, my Committee will publish a report recommending what that body should look like.

We have come a long way, even since our inquiry earlier this year. Back then, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), told us that no legislation was necessary. But we recommended that the right to clean air be put into law. I am glad that the Government now accept the need for legislation as part of a clean air strategy to meet our EU obligations.

We also need to ensure that we are looking at how we can phase out petrol and diesel cars, and we need the Government to be joined up on this issue. During our inquiry, we sat there with four Ministers in front of us, and it was a bit like a children's party game—pass the parcel. The Department for Communities and Local Government passed it on to the Department for Transport, which passed it on to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—the DEFRA Minister was the star of the show—and the Department of Health. The issue was being passed around. The people responsible for designing the cities were not talking to the people designing the transportation system, who were not talking to the people responsible for air quality, who were not talking to the public health people. This is not acceptable. We cannot allow air pollution to keep falling through the policy cracks and gaps in this way.

We now hear that the Government's plans to phase out petrol and diesel cars are being downgraded to a "mission". Well, saints protect us from Governments on a mission. Norway is going to phase out the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2025. India, the Netherlands, Germany and Scotland all plan to do so earlier than the UK. We are missing a trick here. If we are not in the vanguard when it comes to acting on this issue, we are going to lose the global environmental race. The fourth industrial revolution has already started. It is taking place at technological speed—at the speed of the tech revolution. Things are going to start speeding up very quickly.

Buses are the Cinderella in all this. Only one quarter of buses in west Yorkshire meet the Euro 5 standard. I am sure that it is very similar in south Yorkshire, Madam Deputy Speaker. When the National Audit Office looked at the cost-benefit analysis, it found that a clean bus fund—a fund to clean up buses, heavy goods vehicles and taxis—would cost the public purse £170 million, but it would cost the public nothing. As the largest purchaser of goods and services in the country, the Government should really look to act on this issue.

When we audited the Ministry of Justice—a big Department with lots of prisons, probations, courts and estate to look after—we found that it had just three electric vehicles, even though it is responsible for a quarter of Government spend on goods and services. Greening Government commitments mean nothing if the Government are not acting as well. Why does the NHS not have an electric car fleet? We spend £110 billion or £120 billion of public money on the health service every year, yet we are allowing our nurses and doctors out in the community to drive polluting vehicles. It is just not on. We have to lead by example.

Will the Minister tell us when he is going to bring forward the commitments to label cars more clearly? People buy cars every day of the week, but they are buying a pig in a poke. They might be looking at the taxation side of their purchase, but they do not know about the emissions side. It costs nothing to introduce those labelling standards. When can we expect to see them?

Finally, we have heard a lot about electric vehicles and low-emission vehicles. I travel to work in this place every day on an ultra-low emission vehicle. It is called a bicycle. It emits no carbon apart from my breath, which is sometimes a little heavier and laboured when it is a bit hot. Every day, I cycle past the measurement on the embankment, which reads, for example, "6,000 cyclists today" or "10,000 cyclists today". It was perhaps a bit lower when we had the "beast from the east", although I still cycled in through the snow—very, very slowly. Blackfriars bridge now carries more cyclists than cars each day.

As someone who hails from Coventry, where James Starley invented the bicycle in 1868, I think that we need to start going back to the future. We need to look at electric bicycles and at how we design cities that are not for cars. Coventry was rebuilt after the war for cars, not for people, but we need to design cities where people can move and breathe, and where we can make short journeys around through active travel, and save the health service and ourselves a lot of pain, a lot of hassle and a lot of money.

2.7 pm

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh); I really enjoyed my time with her on the Environmental Audit Committee. This is a very important debate and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in it. I also thank my west country colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), for presenting the joint report of the four Select Committees.

Pollution and poor air quality are very important issues. These are public health emergencies that need addressing. The discussion around pollution and air quality often focuses on large urban areas such as London, where there is lots of dense traffic and many large public transport systems. The issue of poor air quality in rural areas like mine is sometimes forgotten because, understandably, large urban cities have the most pollution. As a rural MP, I want to highlight an issue specific to my constituency—the case of a small town in a very rural area that suffers from poor air quality—and to state why action is needed.

Camelford is at the heart of my North Cornwall constituency, and has a population of only 3,000 people. It does not have any large factories with smoke pouring out, planes flying overhead or thousands of people swarming the pavements using buses, taxis and trains. But it does have a main arterial road running right through the town centre that is used by lots of cars, lorries and tractors, which all pass through at a constant rate. There are chicanes in the town centre, and lots of traffic lights. Whenever people drive through Camelford, they are inevitably caught in a queue of traffic that crawls through the town. The queuing cars are polluting the small and narrow town centre, where many people

[Scott Mann]

are walking up and down the pavements doing their day-to-day chores. We have seen traffic levels rise year on year, with many more cars and lorries, and therefore more pollution, which means an increased risk to public health.

The reason why Camelford suffers from all this congestion and pollution is that the A39 runs right through the town centre. The A39 is a busy road running down the centre of North Cornwall, connecting some of the constituency's biggest towns, which are very popular with tourists, and the road is used heavily in the summer months. It is an important road for connecting Devon and Cornwall, heavily used by heavy goods vehicles, with lots of agricultural movements every day. The high number of local farms means that there is lots of farm traffic, as well as lorries travelling to and from the various communities dotted along the road.

In general, the road is quite free-flowing. It is a single carriageway that dips in and out of valleys, as is normal in the Cornish countryside, and around various twists and turns. The road does not encounter much congestion until we get to Camelford town. The road narrows as it reaches the town centre, and the traffic is funnelled into a very narrow high street. Anyone who has been to Cornwall will know that we built much of our housing on the side of roads, and you do not have to walk far off the pavement to be in someone's house. Some of the buildings on the road are three or four storeys high and are very close to the cars passing in the immediate vicinity, which means the pollution cannot easily escape. That has been proven by tests conducted by Cornwall Council in pollution hotspots near the town centre. Traffic cannot flow in both directions at the same time as the town centre has a traffic light shuttle system, and there are chicanes and lights to stagger traffic. That causes queues, frustration, delays, noise and pollution, and threatens the wellbeing of my constituents and those living along the road or taking their children to the nearby school.

Because of the pollution and air quality issues, Cornwall Council has had to place Camelford in an air quality management area under the Environment Act 1995. Those management areas can be introduced when a local authority knows that levels of seven different pollutants exceed domestic or EU limits. In 2016, the council found high levels of carbon monoxide in Camelford, which are directly attributable to the motor vehicles passing along the A39. The air quality assessment found that the daily average number of vehicles passing through the town centre in 2015 was 6,028, up by almost 1,000 or 25% from 2011. With regard to pollutants, the assessment found that carbon monoxide levels were present in a variety of locations and that they exceeded the UK's annual mean objective.

As part of the air quality management area process, the council has developed a draft action plan, which went out to consultation earlier this year. The action plan focuses on the option of a bypass, which it has concluded would be the most effective way of dealing with the congestion in the town centre. In tandem with that work, Cormac, which is part of Cornwall Council, has published an options appraisal report that lays out the options for remedying the congestion issues. The report concludes that either a HGV diversion route

should be implemented or a bypass should be constructed, and it soundly recommends that the best long-term solution to the problem in the town would be a bypass.

The population of Camelford will grow substantially over the years, and it is imperative that we nip this problem in the bud as soon as possible. In the next 15 to 20 years, there will be thousands more vehicles passing along the road every week, leading to higher carbon monoxide levels and putting my constituents' health at risk. I feel that it would be a dereliction of my duty if I did not talk about this issue and raise it in the House.

As the Minister will know, the Department for Transport is working on a new major roads network, which will map out the various major roads around England that are not part of the strategic road network. The draft MRN includes the A39 in North Cornwall, which means that the construction of a bypass could be funded through the multimillion-pound funding streams available through the MRN. A bypass would not only address the poor air quality but facilitate economic growth and unlock land for housing.

Poor air quality remains the most important issue. My constituents deserve to live in a community that does not suffer from these high levels of pollution. When debating the NHS and public health, Members and health experts often say that prevention is better than cure. Camelford is a prime example of that principle. The signs are that air quality is getting poorer and we know that traffic levels will get higher and that the town will get bigger. A bypass is the only long-term solution, and I hope that both DEFRA and the Department for Transport will make it possible for my constituents and their children to go about their day-to-day lives in a healthy environment. I fully support the Government's manifesto commitment to leave the environment in a better state than we found it in, but it is issues such as this that will define whether we are true to our word.

2.14 pm

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): It is my view that the House is discussing the biggest public health scandal that Britain faces. As we have heard, air pollution is the second biggest avoidable killer after smoking. Unlike smoking, it is not avoidable for most people—most people do not choose where they live or the air they breathe, and that is particularly the case for children. In most cases, it is invisible, so the level of public and political consciousness about this is not as high as it should be, given the tens of thousands of unnecessary premature deaths a year and all the illnesses that air pollution causes.

We have heard that the cost to business and the NHS is £20 billion a year. Incidentally, the Treasury Minister who appeared before our joint Committee inquiry—the then Exchequer Secretary, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones)—was not aware of that figure, which I thought was appalling. For a Treasury Minister not to be aware of the cost to the public purse of a major health emergency was, in my view, astonishing.

Mary Creagh: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a bit of a running theme with the Treasury, which is very keen to look at the money that it controls, but not very keen to look at how costs are externalised on to other services such as the health service?

Mr Bradshaw: I completely agree.

UNICEF brought out a shocking report last week, which said that one in three children in the United Kingdom are now growing up in areas with unsafe levels of air pollution. It has been widely acknowledged across the House that successive Governments have had insufficient urgency in dealing with this problem. The Government have finally published their draft strategy but, as others have said, it is just not good enough. It is full of further prevarication, delays and half-measures. It passes the buck to local government, which is in many areas under-resourced and under-qualified to deal with this problem.

In my area, for example, we still have a two-tier local authority system. The problem is in the city, where the air is worst, but my Labour city council does not have control over the levers of planning and transportation, which are in the hands of the Conservative-run Devon County Council. It is always difficult to get those two authorities to work together but, on a problem as challenging and expensive as this, they really need more support and strategic lead from the Government.

Lilian Greenwood: Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the communities that are most affected by poor air quality tend to be the most deprived communities, often living close to city centres? It may well be those councils that have suffered the greatest reductions in their spending capability, and we face a real danger of widening health inequalities, as well as those funding inequalities.

Mr Bradshaw: I completely agree. One of my frustrations is that some of the more radical measures, such as congestion charging or workplace carpark charging, have an impact on many people who drive into my city from the rural areas. The politics of a county authority championing those sorts of policy are really hard. I am pleased that progress is being made in Oxford between a Labour city council and a Conservative-run county council. That is a model to take forward, but it is very difficult in two-tier local authority areas.

It is clear to me and to the experts that the draft strategy as it stands will not ensure that we meet our legal requirements, let alone the stricter World Health Organisation air quality recommendations. As we say in our report, we badly need mandated clean air zones—I cannot for the life of me understand why the Government do not just introduce those—and we need practical and real help for individuals and businesses to move to cleaner forms of transport. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), who chairs the Environmental Audit Committee, rightly said, we need a massive modal shift in transport in our towns and cities. Most short journeys in towns and cities that are conducted by car could perfectly easily be done by most able-bodied people by bicycle or foot. As she said, the electric bicycle will revolutionise the way we move around towns and cities.

Mary Creagh: My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. When I was in Warsaw the other day, I went to a hire a bike. I accidentally hired an electric bike. I can tell him: when the weather is hot and the hills are hard, that is the only way to go.

Mr Bradshaw: If my hon. Friend does not mind my saying so, she is still a bit too young to have to resort to assistance with her cycling. One of the reasons that we both maintain our svelte shape is that we are both avid cyclists. I am putting off the moment when I have to resort to an electric bike, even given the very challenging hills in my Exeter constituency.

We are seeing progress in some places. As a number of colleagues have mentioned, London has already improved significantly, with big increases in cycling, but that is because of the congestion charge and the provision of designated safe cycle routes. Similarly in my constituency, when we were a cycling demonstration town under the Labour Government, there was significant investment in safe cycle routes. That has all dried up, however, and what support there is for cycling and walking is very patchy; it is not strategic. Again, when we asked the Ministers who came before our joint Committee if they knew how much money was being spent on cycling and walking and where, they simply could not answer the question. They are not monitoring it. There is no collection of the data. All of this needs to be much, much more joined up.

As others have already said, the only reason the Government are doing anything is that they have been forced to by the domestic and European courts. One of my real concerns—the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee touched on this—is that the Government seem to be trying to put off doing anything meaningful until we are out of the European Union and no longer subject to European environmental legislation or the European Court of Justice, with ordinary members of the public unable not only to demand but to enforce their rights through the courts if those rights are not honoured by our own domestic Government. I have a real concern that, if we leave the European Union, we will go back to being the dirty man of Europe, as we were in the early 1970s, before we joined.

Britain has a proud record of being a leader on public health. We had the Clean Air Act 1956, the seatbelt campaign and real success in tackling smoking and drinking, both of which have gone down significantly. However, on air quality, we seem to have a sort of stubborn refusal to act. I have been asking myself why that is. Is it because of a fear of the powerful motorists lobby? Perhaps, but as other hon. Members have said it is motorists inside the vehicles who are being polluted the most—10 times more than those people pushing their children in prams or walking up the street. They may think they are being polluted more, but people in vehicles are actually in much greater danger. A clear publicity campaign about that might persuade a few people to change their minds and their habits.

I believe that clean air is a human right. We have to get out of the mindset—as we have with smoking in public places, incidentally—that vehicles have a God-given right to drive around our towns and cities polluting and fouling the air, and causing serious health problems and costs to our country as a whole. I hope that, when the Government strategy is eventually published, it will have taken on board the concerns that have been raised by Members in the House and the concerns of the experts, and that it really will have some teeth in order to make the difference that this country and the people of this country deserve.

2.23 pm

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Last month, the World Health Organisation published a list of the 30 worst polluted areas—those exceeding their limits—in the country. These included, perhaps not surprisingly, London, Liverpool, Leeds and Manchester, but they also included Storrington in my constituency—Storrington was among the 30 worst polluted areas in the whole country. It is worse than that. Compare My Move reported earlier this month that, using the WHO data on the worst pollutants—fine particulate matter—the worst cities for air pollution were Bristol, Stanford-le-Hope, Swansea and Storrington; it called that a city. These places had a higher concentration of pollutants than London. Storrington was the worst place in the south-east.

The “city” of Storrington is in fact a village, of just 7,000 residents, and it is at the foot of the South Downs national park. It is in very picturesque country and it is astonishing that it should be one of the places with the very worst air pollution in the country. The reason is the traffic that is forced through the village. It was declared an air quality management area eight years ago. A low emissions trial was set up, but it was abandoned after just one year because, ironically, there was no mobile phone signal available in that rural area, so the data could not be sent. Some 3% of the traffic through Storrington is made up of heavy goods vehicles, but they are responsible for 30% of the pollution.

Local people know that there is a very good reason traffic is so heavy through Storrington, and why the air pollution is consequently so bad when the traffic queues. The reason is that the traffic is forced up through the downs because of congestion on the A27, which runs at the bottom of the south downs and through my constituency. That was once said or meant to be the coastal highway, but significant parts of it are not dualled and it has very serious congestion, including at Arundel. As a consequence, the traffic aims to miss the congestion on the A27 and instead rat-runs through the historic town of Arundel in my constituency and up through the south downs and downland villages such as Storrington. That accounts for the terrible air quality.

There is, therefore, a very strong environmental case for trying to do something about that traffic. The obvious thing to do is to upgrade the A27 to make the traffic flow freely along what is in any case a very important route economically, as the east-west connection in the south of England. At last—this has been delayed for over three decades—we have a plan for the Arundel bypass. I am very grateful to the Government for announcing the funding for the bypass a few years ago, and Highways England has recently announced the preferred route for the scheme. There are of course some local objections to the bypass, as there always are, but my judgment is that there is overwhelming local support for it, not least because of all the traffic running up through the towns and the air pollution in places such as Storrington as a consequence.

It was, therefore, very surprising and disappointing when the South Downs National Park Authority announced that it would seek a judicial review of Highways England’s preferred route. This is an extraordinary position: a public body, using public funds and through proper consultation, has identified the best route for a bypass that the Government have announced funding for and say is necessary; and another publicly funded body, the

South Downs National Park Authority—paying absolutely no regard to the views of local people or local villages in the communities in the South Downs national park—has decided, on what is clearly a purely ideological basis, to seek a judicial review of the route and has tried to prevent it from happening simply because it touches a tiny part of the national park right at the bottom of it.

In fact, everybody knows that this will be a South Downs national park relief road. Highways England official projections show that annually there are 15,287 daily traffic movements on average through Storrington, causing all the congestion and pollution and that, with the Arundel bypass on the preferred route, there would be over 3,000 fewer traffic movements in the first year after the bypass opens—over 20% fewer—and by 2041 there would be nearly 6,000 fewer traffic movements, or 38% fewer. So the bypass would clearly prevent the problems of the traffic queuing in this downland village.

Despite that, we have this attempted judicial review. The meeting was not public. Notice was barely given of it. Where is the accountability for this decision? Why is not the South Downs National Park Authority made party to the collective decisions that ought to be taken by local authorities on environmental matters, including reducing air pollution? Why can it simply stand above that, when it is clearly of such environmental benefit overall to the south downs and the downland communities? Its actions are completely unacceptable, and local communities are rightly very angry at what it is seeking to do.

Another village in my constituency, Cowfold, is also over the statutory limits on air pollution. It exceeds both the EU and the WHO maximum levels. It is an even smaller village, of only 2,000 people, but it sits on the A272, and again there is queuing traffic. It was declared an air quality management area in 2011, but there has been no real action for seven years. Some 4% of the traffic is heavy goods vehicles, but they contribute 37% of the pollution. The parish council wants a very simple thing. It wants signs put up by the side of the main routes that run north and south alongside the village, the A24 and the A23, to discourage heavy goods vehicles from taking the route along the A272.

There are perfectly viable dual carriageway routes that go away from this road and village, and there are means by which to discourage heavy goods vehicles from taking this route, yet we have seen a complete failure by the relevant local authorities to take forward any initiative to do the simple thing of introducing these signs. West Sussex County Council says that there is no evidence to support the contention that heavy goods vehicle traffic would be affected by the signs wherever they might be placed. It needs a feasibility study, but there is no funding for one.

I welcome the Government’s air quality plan published last July—I am not churlish about it as other hon. Members are—because it represents a welcome step towards taking action in places such as Storrington and Cowfold. I note that the Government announced a £255 million implementation fund to support local authorities in conducting things such as feasibility studies, and I think £40 million of that was meant to be made available immediately, so can the Minister confirm that the fund is available to places such as Storrington and Cowfold, so that they can conduct feasibility studies, and that the clean air fund, which the Government also

announced, will be available to those local authorities if they then need to take measures as a consequence of the feasibility studies?

We cannot let this matter drag on. It has affected Storrington and Cowfold for well over a decade. We need energetic joint action by all the local authorities, and that needs to be supported, in the way the Government have suggested, by Government funding so that studies can be commissioned and action taken. At the moment, there has been inertia by all concerned, but when there are rural areas and tiny villages at the foot of the south downs with the very worst air pollution in the country, something is wrong. It is completely avoidable and it is time we did something about it.

2.33 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate, and I congratulate the Select Committees on bringing forward this important report. Effective action on air quality is now vital and urgent. I live in a town centre with heavy traffic and am, I think, personally affected as much as anyone by poor air quality. I also congratulate hon. Members on a series of first-class, informative and persuasive speeches.

I have a particular interest in the transport aspects of our air quality problems, and I have two proposals to advance today. I have had a long association with transport policy. I was the transport policy officer at the TUC in the 1970s, and later I worked on transport policy at the National and Local Government Officers' Association, which became part of Unison. NALGO and others put forward a proposal to transfer the whole cost of vehicle licensing to fuel. We have a sliding scale now, but it is less effective than transferring the total cost to fuel. The advantages are that it would promote and encourage the use of fuel-efficient vehicles—hybrids and electric vehicles, in particular—and deter excessive vehicle usage and mileage. For many, it is necessary to own a vehicle. Less well-off people who live in rural areas depend on private motor transport, and having a cheaper vehicle would be better for them, while it would deter excessive car usage by better-off people—those like ourselves who perhaps drive our cars more than we should. I still believe that such a policy would be sensible, even though successive Governments have rejected the idea, at least so far, and that it should be given further consideration.

My second interest, and my primary concern, is to advance the case for GB Freight Route, a scheme to build a freight priority railway line from the channel tunnel to Glasgow, linking all the major economic regions of Britain to each other and to the continent of Europe. It would take 5 million lorry journeys off our roads each year and save millions of tons of toxic emissions. We would need to make possible the carriage of lorry trailers and lorries on trains, however, as significant modal shift for freight from road to rail cannot take place unless lorry trailers can be transported on trains. Our historic rail network cannot carry such traffic because of loading gauge restrictions. The tunnels and bridges are too small and too tight to accommodate lorry trailers on trains.

GB Freight Route would overcome that problem. It would be constructed on old track bed and under-utilised lines and has been precisely designated as a route. Sites

for terminals where lorry trailers would be lifted on and off trains have been identified, close to motorways serving our major cities and regions. GB Freight Route has major support from a wide range of interests including major hauliers, Eurotunnel, supermarket logistics departments and many others. I have made many presentations, including to Rail Ministers in the past, and intend to carry on doing so.

I should declare an interest—a non-pecuniary interest, I emphasise—as a member of the team promoting GB Freight Route. We have received support from a transport consultancy and a major railway equipment company, which have raised the matter with the Transport Secretary. Other members of our team include experienced railway engineers, a major haulier and a member with city experience and links. We have, then, a wide range of skills in our team promoting the scheme.

Today is perhaps not the time to go into great detail about GB Freight Route, but I hope it will be supported by all those concerned about the air quality crisis that affects us all in Britain and which must be addressed. GB Freight Route can and should make a substantial contribution to improving air quality, especially in and around our cities, and I hope that hon. Members will consider supporting it and urge the Government to give it serious and positive consideration.

2.37 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), who has great knowledge of this area.

I am delighted to speak in this debate, partly because I was a member of the joint inquiry that produced the report, but also because my family has been affected by a lung condition of unknown origin. My mother suffered from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, a life-limiting condition diagnosed in about 6,000 new patients each year—it used to be 5,000 each year. Life expectancy from the time of diagnosis is as short as three years for half of those 6,000 people, with one in five surviving for five years—soon for longer, I hope, with the new treatments available. As the name suggests, no one knows what causes it. My mother did not smoke, so it was not that, but it could have been air quality—or, more correctly, poor air quality. We need to do whatever we can to tackle any root cause of lung disease, as no one should have to struggle for breath as my mother did.

I wish to focus on three areas. First, just yesterday I was talking to constituents of mine who had just brought a hybrid car. I was astounded when they informed me that there is only one public charging point in Long Eaton, one of my major towns, and that it is at a hotel, and therefore behind car park barriers. The joint inquiry highlighted the problem that there are too few charging points to support a wider uptake of such vehicles, and this rings warning bells for me. I can envisage a situation comparable to that which we have with mobile phones and broadband coverage—providers falling over themselves to provide services in highly populated areas, while the more rural areas miss out. The patchwork approach to funding and delivering charging points simply is not working. I therefore call upon the Government to do whatever they can to facilitate the installation of adequate infrastructure, to support the UK's transit away from polluting vehicles. I would appreciate an

[Maggie Throup]

update from the Minister today regarding the Government's investment in electric vehicle infrastructure. The report's recommendation for the Government to work with the National Grid and local authorities to identify the key practical barriers preventing a more rapid roll-out is, in my opinion, very valid.

My constituents yesterday also informed me that there are in the region of 30 providers, all requiring different apps to access their charging points. As petrol and diesel cars are phased out in the coming years, the practicalities of charging points also need to be considered.

Secondly, there was evidence in the report that it is of paramount importance for air quality monitoring to be carried out at key spots in local communities, such as near schools, hospitals and, as my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) mentioned, care homes. The Government's acknowledgment that those changes need to be made is key, and the monitoring is very welcome because, as with any issue, knowledge is power. Data collected as a result of that monitoring should be disseminated to schools, nurseries and hospitals, with clear advice actions that need to be taken. That will also ensure that information can be available for families, empowering parents to make the right decisions for their children. As the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) highlighted, current data shows that a third of our children are living in areas of the UK with unsafe levels of particulate matter, so we need to take much more rapid action.

Thirdly, I shall discuss my local area. I have a combination of a wish list and an update on what is happening in Erewash and the wider Derby and Nottingham area. The World Health Organisation has reported that both Derby and Nottingham are among the 44 cities in Britain that have air that is not safe to breathe. I therefore plead with local authorities to put tackling that problem at the very top of their agenda. HS2 in the future, and improvements in rail infrastructure such as Ilkeston's new station, can help to reduce the amount of road traffic heading into our cities.

Derby, famous for "planes, trains and automobiles", is a highly strategic area for research and development of cleaner, greener transport for the future. The next-generation Auris hybrid car is to be built at Toyota in Burnaston, safeguarding around 3,000 jobs into the 2020s. It has also secured an investment of £240 million in the plant there.

We have heard from the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) of some of the initiatives that Nottingham city is taking, and I want to add a few items to that list. The University of Nottingham, in partnership with firms such as Rolls-Royce, is leading the way in R&D of cleaner, greener, more efficient engines. The university is also gaining a new £23 million research facility to drive breakthroughs in treatment and diagnosis of serious diseases, including respiratory conditions.

To return to Derby, the construction of a new nuclear advanced manufacturing research centre in Derby, which I mentioned during the urgent question today, would enable further research into and development of clean energy, as the UK looks to civil nuclear as a way of securing its power needs for the future. That would

include exploring the viability of small modular reactors; as mentioned earlier, Rolls-Royce is leading the way in that as well.

Many exciting projects are being undertaken across the Derby and Nottingham corridor, and indeed throughout the country, that will make a contribution to improving air quality. However, we have no time to lose, so I urge the Government to do whatever they can to ensure that action is taken at scale and pace.

2.44 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful to be called to make a brief contribution to this debate. I congratulate the Select Committees on their reports. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) for his excellent introductory speech. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup), who made her trademark thoughtful contribution to the debate.

I want to focus on the River Thames. It is busier now than it has ever been—even than its heyday in the '30s—due to containerisation, so congratulations to London Gateway, Tilbury and the other access ports. I commend inner-London river traffic: Bennett's Barges, Thames Clippers and the tourist fleet, including the excellent City Cruises. I will return to Thames construction traffic in a moment, but first I want to mention river crossings in London. West of Tower Bridge, there are more than 20 crossings over the Thames. East of Tower Bridge, where estimates say half of London's population now live, there are only two river crossings between the Tower of London and Dartford. The static traffic and massive congestion through and around the Blackwall tunnel is a huge source of emissions and pollution, contaminating the whole of east London and drifting westward.

I commend the Department for Transport and Mayor Khan for recently confirming the construction of the Silvertown tunnel from Greenwich to Newham. However, it is worth remembering that it took five years to convince Mayor Livingstone that his manifesto against east London river crossings was wrong, and after him, it took three years to convince the right hon. Gentleman who is now Foreign Secretary, when he was Mayor of London, that his own manifesto against east London river crossings was wrong. Fortunately, Mayor Khan has arrived convinced of the need for these crossings, and with DFT support the Silvertown tunnel has now been given a green light. I would welcome the Minister's confirmation of that, and perhaps an update on other possible river crossings, with public transport access, which would be very welcome indeed and in line with recommendation 15 of the report and the Government response. Tolling might be needed to help pay for those, because obviously they come at a cost.

Kelvin Hopkins: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that a case has been made for a lower Thames crossing—a tunnel for traffic that would take some of the traffic away from my hon. Friend's constituency? It might, we suggest, be combined with a rail tunnel for GB Freight Routes. That would cut costs and be a very convenient crossing for both.

Jim Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend is a well-known champion of rail freight transportation, and in his speech he made the case quite well for the construction of a national link. Were there to be a lower Thames

crossing, obviously one would expect the authorities, local, regional and national, to get the biggest bang for the taxpayer's pound, to ensure that we get the maximum benefit. I am sure that, as and when that debate takes place, my hon. Friend will be at the forefront of those advocating a rail dimension to that crossing.

Dr Whitford: On a point of interest, will these tunnels also have separate pedestrian and cyclist tunnels? Obviously, putting pedestrians and cyclists in the tunnel with traffic would be even worse than what are discussing, and why should they end up in a car because of the long route that needs to be taken by those on a bike?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. The Minister may well be able to say what access there will be for both pedestrians and cyclists. We have two tunnels in east London. In the Blackwall tunnel there is no capacity for either pedestrians or cyclists, given the volumes of traffic and the narrowness of the verges. The Rotherhithe tunnel, which is even smaller and was constructed in the late 19th century, has restrictions on size, but the pollution down there is horrendous. One would therefore expect that new tunnels could have such capacity, separated from normal traffic, but I do not know whether that is in the construction plans. That is why I asked about public transport access. If that is included, pedestrians and cyclists can use those modes to negotiate the Thames, because it is a barrier in east London. As I said, half of London's population lives in east London and people who want to get from south London to their jobs in Canary Wharf, the City and the west end find it really difficult to commute successfully.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): My hon. Friend has mentioned the Rotherhithe and Blackwall tunnels, which connect to the north circular road, the A406, which goes through my constituency. Does he welcome Mayor Khan's low-emission zones and the impact that they will have on reducing emissions across London, therefore saving people's lives?

Jim Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Several colleagues have mentioned the excellent work that Mayor Khan is doing, with the low-emission zones being very much part of his strategy to tackle air quality. That is a huge priority for his administration, so the point was well made by my hon. Friend. The A406 is a very important artery for London.

I was just about to discuss the Thames itself. Not only are more tourists and commuters using it, but there is more construction traffic. The Thames Tideway tunnel is a good example of a major infrastructure project using the river to the benefit of Londoners. Chris Livett, waterman to the Queen, recently unveiled a fleet of new barges for not just this project, but others. The largest of the barges, of which there are a number, has a capacity of 1,500 tonnes. Each barge carries the equivalent of 50 HGVs—that is 50 lorries off London's roads—reducing the risk of crashes, congestion, pollution and damage to our road services. This is all very welcome and cleaner, too, and as I say, that means every single barge. Any Member who is on the Terrace at any point over the next three years, enjoying a cup of coffee or tea or something else, will see those barges floating past and heading further along the Thames, where they will be creating environmental habitats for wildlife.

However, there is one issue affecting the Thames that is causing concern: the plan to build a cruise terminal at Enderby Wharf in Greenwich. I do not mean the proposal for the terminal, which is positive—anything that brings more tourists to London is to the benefit of London's economy and the wider UK, because when tourists get here, they can travel more widely. The problem, however, is how to power these large vessels when they are moored on the Thames between Greenwich and Tower Hamlets. I have been working with my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook) to address local residents' concerns, and I pay tribute to his campaigning skills and efforts on his constituents' behalf.

The majority five-to-four planning decision of Greenwich Council to approve the application, which did not require shore-to-ship power, has caused great consternation on both banks among residents. The EFRA Committee has looked at this matter in previous inquiries. Neither the Port of London Authority nor the Environment Agency, the Mayor of London, the Government, or the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, which are all affected by the London Borough of Greenwich's decision, can alter or amend its approval. The prospect of large cruise ships having to run their equally large diesel engines to power the vessels when they are moored on the river for up to 155 days a year is not positive. Ports on the west coast of the USA, in Scandinavia and in other parts of the EU are bringing in regulations to require shore-to-ship power, called "cold ironing". Southampton is also looking at this so that ships take the energy from the national grid. Given the challenges of air quality in London, will the Minister advise the House what can be done to make the cruise terminal not just a success, but a clean success?

In conclusion, there is a real risk that we will lose the terminal due to the controversy over this issue. That would be greatly disappointing. We want the investment and the employment, and we would love the tourists. We just do not want it at a dirty price.

2.53 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to this very welcome debate, and it was a great pleasure, too, to serve on the Joint Committee. My first point is about that Joint Committee: having inquiries that more than one Select Committee can participate in is a very welcome development. I urge the House to consider how more such inquiries might be facilitated. Earlier today we had a statement from the Health and Social Care Committee and the Communities and Local Government Committee on long-term care. Bringing expertise from a range of perspectives is very helpful and I would like to see more of it.

There are five brief points I would like to contribute to the debate. The first picks up on a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), which is that too often we have silo thinking in government and a lack of effective cross-departmental co-operation. It goes further than just policymaking, however. There has to be a change in culture in how schemes are budgeted for and evaluated for cost-effectiveness. Increasingly, we find that where expenditure might lie with one Department the benefit will accrue somewhere else, so it will not show up in the

[Iain Stewart]

usual Treasury reporting of finances. For example, funding for a transport scheme would come from the Department for Transport or local government, but the Department of Health and Social Care might see the benefits because fewer people suffer conditions relating to poor air quality. I therefore urge the Government to start thinking a little bit more about that.

The second issue I would like to raise—I beg the indulgence of the House, but it is quite a techy point—is the Oslo effect. When we look at particle emissions from cars, too often we focus only on tail-pipe emissions. The Oslo effect occurs from invisible and odourless small particles going into the atmosphere as a result of brakes being applied, rubber tyres wearing down on the road, and even bitumen particles being thrown up when tyres hit the road. It may not sound a lot from any one individual car, but the cumulative effect, particularly in areas with high-sided buildings, can be substantial. Some studies show that only one third of particle emissions from cars actually comes from the tail pipe, with two thirds coming from those other sources.

This is a little bit counter-intuitive and I am certainly not arguing against the uptake of low-emission vehicles and moving to hybrid and electric cars, but like for like, those vehicles are heavier than their petrol or diesel equivalents. Therefore, the Oslo effect is exacerbated by those heavier cars. Manufacturers need to be encouraged to look at making cars as light as possible and to research other substances that could be used in place of rubber for brake pads and tyres. It also affects buses, which are by nature much heavier vehicles. I encourage Members—I declare an interest as chair of the all-party group on trams and light rail—not just to think immediately of buses as the best local transport solution. Trams may have a higher capital investment to begin with, but the savings they might deliver will accrue over a longer period of time. I also chair the all-party group on the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor, which will be developing many new settlements over the next few decades. Each of those new settlements will have to develop local transport plans. This would be an ideal place to start looking at new and effective public transport solutions that are, as other Members have suggested, not car-centric, and at making it easier for people to walk or cycle to their destinations.

That leads me on to my third point, which is on cycling. I too have started cycling in London, from here to my home in London which happily resides in the constituency of the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick). I too cycle past the monitor that shows how many bikes go past each day. I absolutely encourage people to take up more cycling, but as the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) mentioned one of the biggest changes will come from electric bikes. There is a problem here. In my constituency in Milton Keynes, we have a network called redways, which are segregated from the main roads, for cyclists and pedestrians. At the moment, it is illegal to use an electric bike on them. I am trying to get to the bottom of whether this is a local authority decision or a more national matter.

Dr Whitford: As an electric bike owner—I tried not to take offence at the comments of the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) about electric bike

owners—I know that there are two classes of electric bikes, one of which is allowed in cycle lanes and one of which is not. I wonder whether it is that difference about which the hon. Gentleman is hearing.

Iain Stewart: I am very grateful for that information. I was not aware that there were two classes of electric bikes, and I will certainly look into it. I imagine there is a great deal of confusion among people who own or might want to purchase an electric bike, and a bit more clarity might be helpful.

My fourth point concerns the use of new technology. We must always be looking into how new technology might be deployed to reduce transport emissions. I certainly do not want to reopen the debate about Heathrow, but time constraints prevented me from expanding on this subject in my speech on Monday. New technologies are available that will reduce emissions from the existing airport. One example is the TaxiBot, an autonomous electric vehicle which will take planes from the stand to the runway without the need to switch on the aircraft engines.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I too am aware of various initiatives, but would the hon. Gentleman care to tell us to what extent and by what proportion such initiatives will reduce air pollution, and by when they will be implemented? I do not remember seeing that in the documents from the Department for Transport.

Iain Stewart: I am afraid that I do not have the figures relating to the actual effect, but I do know that the technology to which I have just referred is already being implemented at Frankfurt airport. It is a proven technology, and it does make a difference. I appreciate that it may not deal with the overall, wider issues relating to air quality and airports, but that single step will help.

My final point will be very brief. The diesel scrappage scheme has been mentioned today. I urge caution on that, because it can be a very blunt instrument and can affect less affluent people disproportionately. The Committees received evidence from the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association, which has suggested, for instance, that drivers of polluting diesel vehicles should be offered mobility credits for public transport or electric bikes, rather than a cash sum or a trade-in sum.

Let me end by thanking the Committee's staff for making our inquiry so enjoyable and thought-provoking. I look forward to the Government's taking up many of our recommendations.

3.2 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I welcome the joint report, the introduction to the debate by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), and the speeches made by other Chairs and members of the Committees. It is a particular pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), who focused on particulates. We must not forget that, even if we all move to electric vehicles very soon, there will still be particulates from brake linings, from the road surface itself and from tyres.

I share the concern that has been repeatedly expressed by the Committee members who have spoken today about the lack of action and serious commitment from

the Government on the important issue of air quality. Unlike the Governments of comparable countries, the UK Government seem to be taking this country back by decades. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on cycling—along with the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who is no longer present—I particularly welcome the report's recommendations on active travel. It points out that walking and cycling are not only good for our physical health, but for our mental health. However, they also make good business sense. Let me give two examples.

First, we know that streets in which pedestrians and bikes have priority over cars, which are either permanently or partially excluded, are more commercially successful, as they tend to contain busy shops and places to eat and drink, and low vacancy rates.

Secondly, when the east-west super-cycle highway that goes past this building was at risk of stalling under the previous London Mayor, now the Foreign Secretary, it was a group of big City companies that pushed to restart that project because they recognised that their staff who cycled into work had lower sickness rates and were more productive at work. They were making a clear business link with more walking and more cycling.

We also have responsibilities as a place where people come to visit for all sorts of meetings. I was concerned to hear that we have been alerted to a change of policy on security in this House. Of course, security is paramount. However, for many years, visitors with folding bikes have been able to bring them to their meetings in this House, and they are now being told by security that they cannot do so. People with Bromptons do not generally go around with bike locks, so they do not have the option at security to take them out and lock them on a nearby cycle rack. That certainly concerns me.

I now want to move on to my own constituency. The local air quality is particularly poor. The A4, the M4 and the A316—the London end of the M3—all pass through our area, which is frequently in breach of air quality limits. Our schools are alert to this issue. St Mary's Catholic primary school in Chiswick, one of two schools alongside the A4 and one of 50 across London identified as needing an air quality audit by the London Mayor, is now considering a green wall against the A4 and air purifiers, but both of those cost money to install and maintain. Without action by local, regional and national government, St Mary's children will continue to breathe in air that is poisoning them as they learn and play.

I am proud of the work that the London Borough of Hounslow is doing on this issue. Last week, it held an anti-idling event outside St Mary's, with volunteers from the school and parents approaching drivers in cars who were sitting there waiting for children with their engines idling and warning them of the dangers of this. Hounslow is enforcing idling hotspots in the borough. It is working with GPs to promote an air quality text service for people with lung and heart problems, who are most affected when air pollution levels get high, to warn them not to go outside—not an ideal solution because it does not deal with the actual problem. Hounslow is also rolling out electric vehicle on-street charging columns and providing free cycle training.

Through the Greater London Authority, the London Mayor is rolling out his ultra-low emission zone. I would like it to go further out towards the M25, but it is a good start. There is also the T-charge, and Mayor

Khan is promoting low and zero-emission bus fleets. But all this is not enough without a Government who are taking the issue seriously, with real legislative action. Given that the UK has consistently been in breach of the nitrogen dioxide limits since they became binding in 2010, the Government should not merely enable but enforce, and take action to bring the UK within those limits. A targeted diesel scrappage scheme, as the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South said, should not punish those on low incomes and should be nuanced. We also need a comprehensive 21st-century clean air Act.

I cannot sit down without mentioning the runway 3 expansion. The Government cannot be in compliance with air quality limits and allow the expansion of Heathrow airport. That would increase nitrous oxide emissions by 26% above “do nothing”, according to the airports commission that the Government themselves set up. In the Government's announcement on the draft national policy statement last year, the Secretary of State said that a third runway would put the UK in breach of air quality standards, but in his announcement on Monday he said that it could be achieved while remaining compliant. A similar argument was being made 10 years ago, yet the area is still consistently exceeding air quality limits.

There is no credible explanation from the Secretary of State for Transport as to how Heathrow can expand and compliance be achieved. Furthermore, in all the cost-benefit analysis the Department has done it has not monetised the health impacts on the local population. Moreover, polluting emissions from planes are undoubtedly part of the mix but are seldom mentioned in policy documents. The reality is, however, that the bulk of the air pollution around Heathrow is from vehicular traffic, and a lot of that traffic is connected with airport operations and associated business. Heathrow Airport Holdings Ltd said runway 3 could be built and have 50% more passengers and twice the amount of cargo business without any more vehicular traffic. There is no modelling to justify this incredible statement. Neither the airport nor the Government are prepared to fund more transport infrastructure. Only Transport for London has done the modelling, and it has clearly demonstrated to the Transport Committee that Heathrow's assertion is impossible to achieve. In any case, new rail infrastructure is being discussed. Crossrail is coming online soon, and we are still dithering about the western and southern rail links, which are needed now with the current demands from people going in and out of Heathrow airport to work and travel.

The Government have already lost three legal challenges on their air quality policies, not unconnected with Heathrow. As I have said, there is growing evidence of the ground impact of pollution from planes. How is expanding Heathrow, in an area of the country already consistently in breach of legal limits on air quality, doing anything to stop the UK going back to being the dirty man of Europe?

3.11 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on setting the scene for us all as he so often does, and it is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury). We have a clear difference of opinion on Heathrow, but that is by

[*Jim Shannon*]

the way; I appreciate her comments, and I appreciate the efforts of all the Members who have made valuable contributions so far and those who will do so later.

As a country sports enthusiast, conservation is a core principle that I adhere to, as do all country sports enthusiasts. How to improve our environment and preserve what we have is a key theme. Some 3 million people per year die due to air pollution worldwide and 40,000 people die early deaths as a result of pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide in the UK every year, with the nitrogen dioxide limit values having been unlawfully breached since 2010, as has been said.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's "Tenth Special Report" lists many effects of exposure to air pollution, ranging from cardiovascular diseases to premature birth. It also states that it is children and older people who suffer the most, as exposure to air pollution can result in stunted growth or affect the normal growth of lungs or lead to a child being born prematurely and facing the risk of death during the first year of life as a result of respiratory illness. For older people, there can be accelerated decline in lung function and an increased risk of lung cancer. That means that pollution is becoming more dangerous for the population of the UK as we are an ageing society with about 23% of the population aged 60 and above. If there needs to be a reason for doing something and for this report being followed up by Government today, that is it.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I had hoped to be present earlier to contribute to the debate, but may I, in agreeing with the hon. Gentleman, ask if he will acknowledge that many of us face planning applications for large-scale housing and other developments in our constituencies—in my case, there is an application involving 600 houses and a new branch of Ikea which would lead to 2 million customer journeys a year on the busiest road in Sussex—yet air quality factors seem to feature very low in consideration of such planning applications? Does he agree that, for all the reasons he mentioned, these factors should receive a much higher priority in our assessment of whether applications are sustainable for the local population?

Jim Shannon: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. There is a major development application in my constituency at Comber town for 800 houses. Infrastructure is an important consideration: how the roads will work and whether they can take the increased number of journeys, and whether the schools and hospitals can take it. They are all critical factors, and air quality should be considered in looking at these big questions.

Given the vulnerability of older people to pollution, it is important to improve air quality so that we can reduce the number of deaths and address the issue. There should be Government support for renewable energy, which would limit the use of fossil fuels so that harmful substances such as nitrous oxide, sulphur dioxide and carbon dioxide would not be produced in large amounts and air quality would be improved. That is the very issue that the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) referred to his intervention. I was supportive of the SeaGen initiative in Strangford Lough in my constituency, which would provide clean

energy. It was a really good project, and the pilots were successful but unfortunately the funding to take it further did not happen.

The formation of a thriving public transport system is a major way of improving air quality. I hail from a rural constituency in Strangford, where there are no trains or tubes. There are only buses, and they are infrequent owing to the low population in the area. That means that there is a lot of work to be done there. For some of my constituents, taking a five-minute phone call at the end of the day could mean that they return home an hour late. The bus service is obviously not as frequent as it is here in London and elsewhere. There must be greater ring-fenced funding for public transport in rural areas. This would allow public transport to run at a loss for a longer period, to enable people to understand that the public transport system could merge with their working day and work-life balance needs. This is about striking a balance in the rural community. Public transport needs to be financially viable but it also needs to provide a service.

I completely concur with the recommendation that the Government give priority funding to infrastructure that would help us to meet air quality objectives. Examples include the cycling and walking investment strategy, the Transforming Cities fund and the initiatives to support the uptake of ultra-low emission vehicles. The Bus Services Act 2017 includes a range of measures to improve bus services through franchising and better partnership working. It is also great news that £48 million has been supplied for the new ultra-low emission bus scheme to enable local authorities and bus operators to purchase ultra-low emission buses and support infrastructure. I give credit to the Committee and its report, and also to the Government for the initiatives that they have set in place. That is not enough, however.

Infrastructure that aids in improving these programmes would help by reducing idling and journeys, with low-emission buses aiding the fulfilment of the programme and allowing for superior air quality throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This would improve the quality of life for those who may be vulnerable, and those who are vulnerable, to pollution, but there needs to be a focus on rural areas. With respect to those who have spoken so far in the debate, the majority have talked about urban areas. I am not saying that they should not do so, because that is where the problems are, but we need to look at the bigger picture and see how these problems affect rural areas as well. Comber town, which I mentioned earlier, is a small rural town, and the impact of 800 houses will be quite large. I am not saying that that should not happen; I am saying that we need to prepare for it. In the large metropolitan areas of the UK, the amount of road pollution is substantial. The initiative to introduce low-emission buses will not resolve that issue, but it will lessen its severity.

I agree with the response that indicates that there will be air quality monitoring in key areas of local communities such as schools, care homes and hospitals. In fact, this is already in place in Northern Ireland, where air quality monitoring is carried out by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, along with district councils. Two monitoring stations, at Lombard Street in Belfast and Brooke Park in Londonderry, are the only

stations that measure multiple pollutants, but many other places carry out monitoring, making information widely available for all who need it.

I welcome the £3.5 billion investment that has been provided for the clean air strategy, which aims to cut all forms of air pollution, with recommendations from the World Health Organisation, and introduces primary legislation to grant local government the ability to take decisive action to solve any issues. We cannot ignore what is happening elsewhere in the world. The report focuses on what is happening in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but there are other partners and countries across the world that need to play their part as well. If we are playing our part here, they need to play their part as well.

The biggest causes of pollution in Northern Ireland are road traffic and domestic emissions. These can be curbed, and many attempts are being made to do that. Less reliance on fossil fuels and more on renewable resources will allow Northern Ireland to decrease the amount of pollution emitted as a result of domestic life. If Northern Ireland adopted a clean bus programme, as I believe it should, and tried to convince as many people as possible to take public transport, the pollution resulting from road traffic would be curbed as well, which would improve the overall air quality of the country.

Furthermore, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs here has recommended the establishment of a new environmental protection agency which would be tasked with holding the Government to account once the UK has left the EU. When that is done, will there be direct contact with regional Governments, Assemblies and Parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? It has also been recommended that provisions for the agency should be written into legislation, with powers, standards and enforcement mechanisms equivalent to those of such enforcement agencies in the EU.

Given the standstill in the Northern Ireland Assembly, the environment is also losing out. The introduction of renewable energy schemes would help resolve the issue, as less reliance on and usage of fossil fuels will lessen pollution. The money spent on initiatives such as the beautiful Comber Greenway in my constituency, which allows people to ride their bikes safely from Comber into Belfast off the main roads, helps not only the environment but people's health. That Sustrans project has been immensely successful. The newly improved, widened and lengthened Comber Greenway can now be enjoyed not only in Strangford but in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson)—seven miles of walking, cycling and running.

Recent improvements have widened Comber Greenway to 4 metres along key parts of the route, helping encourage more people to engage in active and sustainable travel—a key aspect of the draft programme for government framework and a result of the recently published “Outcomes Delivery Plan”.

Comber Greenway is a highly used, traffic-free route for many cyclists, walkers and runners, connecting east Belfast with Comber. The investment of almost £600,000 should encourage many more people to consider active travel. There are hopes to further extend Comber Greenway towards Newtownards to allow more people in that

commuter town to choose a healthier and more stress-free way of getting to work, so that they help the environment and themselves.

These schemes are funded by infrastructure budgets as well as communities. They are a wonderful way of improving air quality and health. I look forward to the Minister's response. It is important that we do something to improve air quality not only in towns, but in rural communities.

3.21 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): One of the first big steps forward on air quality came after the great smog of 1952, when 4,000 people died within five days and 8,000 died in the following weeks. From that came the Clean Air Act 1956, which reduced pollution, particularly from coal, coming from industrial and domestic sources. However, in the 50 years since, traffic pollution has soared. Some 70% of UK towns and cities are defined as unsafe, with 37 out of 43 clean air zones failing on nitrous dioxides. There is a road in Lambeth that, every single year since 2010, has reached the number of breaches it is allowed in a year by the end of January.

The issue is not only about nitrous dioxides. Particulates have been mentioned—the 10 micrometres, and, more particularly, the 2.5 micrometres. These tiny particles get much further into the lungs and cause more damage. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned, that damage particularly affects children and older people. Some 4.5 million children—a third of them—are exposed to unsafe levels. If they live near a busy road, they have twice the rate of respiratory problems. We are talking not only about asthma, the obvious one, but about reduced lung development and—if mothers were exposed during pregnancy—reduced brain development. Such things will lay down the quality of a child's life before they are even born. Among older people, particulates increase the deterioration in lung function, as well as causing ischemic heart disease, increased rates of dementia and stroke.

Pressure in this country has developed only because of the threat of legal action from the EU last year; the can has been kicked down the road for years. The UK and eight other countries are facing legal action from the EU unless they get serious and radical. We would consider countries such as Germany and France, particularly Germany, to have good public transport. There is a particular need to invest in trains and trams—and in rural areas, in buses. Since transport was deregulated in the 1980s, Strathclyde in the west of Scotland has gone from having an integrated network of trains, tubes and buses to simply a free-for-all of ancient diesel buses all crowding the same roads. We have gone backwards in the past 40 years, and we need to go forwards. In rural areas, it is buses that are important. When it is just left to private companies, small villages quickly lose their bus services, which is not acceptable. We should be radical, and we should look at cities such as Copenhagen, which ripped up a ring road and turned it into a safe cycle route. We need things like that.

We heard from the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) that the cost of lung disease caused by poor air quality is £20 billion, yet we invest less than

[Dr Philippa Whitford]

5% of that amount in active travel infrastructure. As I said in an intervention, it comes down to health in all policies.

Andrew Selous: The hon. Lady has mentioned Copenhagen. Is she aware that 30% of all journeys in Amsterdam are by bicycle, compared with 2% in London? That came about through a real effort of political will many years ago to recreate the city to be fit for cycling.

Dr Whitford: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. My understanding is that 50% of journeys in Copenhagen are now made by bicycle. But this does require investment in infrastructure.

The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) mentioned a new tunnel at Silvertown. The Clyde tunnel was finished in 1963 and it consists of two circular tunnels, with the road deck about a third of the way up and room for cyclists, pedestrians and ventilation underneath. That was back in the '60s. We need to make sure we are not investing in hugely expensive tunnels that go against active transport.

It is about health in all policies. Decisions are made in silos, even in this place. We make decisions on different days that counteract each other, which is frustrating. If we had physical health and mental wellbeing as an overarching principle like human rights, people sitting in our town halls and here would focus not on cars, on how they drive and how they park—that is the focus in our towns and cities at the moment—but on people. We would design safe, segregated cycle routes, and we would have much wider pavements on which children could ride their scooters, and on which people with prams or wheelchairs would not be crowded out—people would not need to step into the roadway to pass them. When we have such glorious and, in Scotland, very unusual sunny weather, it would also create an environment in which cafés could be outside. People would walk around their town centres and meet their neighbours, which would contribute to a sense of belonging and community. I would love to see health and wellbeing as the driving force in every decision made by town halls, national Government and Westminster on how we design our towns and cities.

Mary Creagh: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Whitford: I have finished, I am afraid. Sorry.

3.27 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I feel privileged to respond to this debate for the Opposition. This is my first time at the Dispatch Box, and I am glad we have had such a good debate, with valuable points made and much agreement on both sides of the House, and with most of my speech helpfully already made by others. I will pay tribute to Members as I go through.

In particular, I pay tribute to the superb report from the four Select Committees and to the points raised by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) and by my hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) and for Wakefield (Mary Creagh). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield on the MP of the year award she was rightly given at the BusinessGreen leaders awards last night.

We can take two things from this debate. First, there is cross-party consensus that a crisis in air quality has been building for many years. Secondly, a number of voices from all sides, all parties and organisations are saying that the Government have been too slow in addressing this crisis and that more needs to be done. My west country neighbour, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, said that bold action is absent, and he is right.

It is not an understatement to say poor air quality is a genuine public health emergency in our towns. We know that poor air quality and air pollution is linked to cancer, asthma, stroke and heart disease. As we have heard today from my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and from the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, poor air quality contributes to the early death of 40,000 people a year. That is 40,000 mums and dads, grandparents, brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters. These are not just statistics; each represents a family tragedy, many of which could be avoided with faster, better, more comprehensive and bold action from Ministers. We are talking about 13 deaths while this debate has been going on. Even the Government accept that they need to do more, so the challenge is: why are they not and can they do better now?

On legal limits, one of the most damning aspects of the Select Committees' report was the comments from the UN special rapporteur, who said he was

“alarmed that despite repeated judicial instruction, the UK government continues to flout its duty to ensure adequate air quality and protect the rights to life and health of its citizens. It has violated its obligations”.

Last year, the *Evening Standard* found that pollution in more than 50 sites in London had breached EU limits. Further evidence from across the country shows that is happening not just in the capital, but across the UK. As we have heard today, it is not just in towns and cities, but in rural areas.

Sadly, the Government have had to be dragged through the courts, failing three times on air quality—in April 2015, November 2016 and February this year, when Mr Justice Garnham declared the Government's failure to require action from 45 local authorities with illegal levels of air pollution in their area “unlawful”. It should not take the courts to get the Government to act on this. I appreciate that the Minister was not in his post at the time, but the Government he represents were.

A recent freedom of information request revealed that the Government have spent £500,000 fighting and losing dirty air court cases, with the most recent costing them £148,135. When we have got nothing from the VW emissions scandal, it is doubly concerning that this money the Government have spent on lawyers could have been spent on mitigations. It could have been spent on walking and cycling, on protecting primary schools from polluting roads or on promoting action on dirty diesel.

We have heard today about particulate matter, which needs further debate. We have heard a lot about PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀, but there is too little research and often too little focus on the harmful effects of nanoparticles, which are even smaller than PM_{2.5}, and especially on the potential harm of magnetic nanoparticles entering the brain. I encourage the Minister to set out what he thinks can be done to undertake further research on nanoparticles in particular.

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend has given me something else to worry about on my Committee—I thought it was just nanoplastics we had to be worried about. Does he agree that, whether we are discussing plastics in the ocean or pollution in the air, we have to stop treating our environment—our rivers and our air—as one great big garbage dump, because we are conducting a massive experiment on ourselves and on the planet, and we do not know where it is going to end?

Luke Pollard: My hon. Friend is exactly right and we need to talk about that much more. When we get into the detail of what is being said on not just plastics, but particles and air quality—the air we breathe and the things we throw away—we see that more and more education can produce better results.

In today's debate, we have heard far too many examples of young people being exposed to harmful levels of particulate matter, as well as carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide and low level ozone. Our young people deserve better than breathing poor air, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) is right to say that breathing clean air should be a human right. Exposure to PM_{2.5} should not exceed 10 micrograms per cubic metre of air, according to the World Health Organisation, but in my Plymouth constituency the figure is 12 micrograms. In Saltash, just over the river, it is 11—the annual mean is 18 and 15 respectively.

Prince Rock Primary School, on my patch, knows all about that, as it is located on a busy road. We have heard from many other hon. Members about schools close to busy roads that are affected by poor air quality. Does the Minister have a similar school in his constituency? How many other Members have schools in areas of illegal air quality? The air quality close to our schools does matter. It matters to our young people. What is being done to educate teachers, children and parents about the risk of air pollution? As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) mentioned, turning engines off while idling can help, and walking or cycling to school can make a positive difference. These things all add up, but if initiatives such as the daily mile are through areas with poor air quality, the effect and positive contribution of that work can be limited. All our children deserve to breathe clean air.

The Government must not only talk the talk, but walk the walk. That is why what we have heard today about the VW emissions scandal should concern us all. The failure to ban diesel and petrol engines early enough was also mentioned by a number of hon. Members. Britain must wean itself off dirty diesel for cars and trains. As the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) highlighted, the British Heart Foundation has found that even short-term inhalation of elevated concentrations of particulate matter increases the risk of heart attack occurring in just 24 hours, but the UK's current legal limits for particulate matter are much less stringent than those of the World Health Organisation.

The flagship measure in the Government's July 2017 air quality report was a pledge to ban new sales of conventional diesel and petrol cars by 2040. That is 22 years and more than four full-term Parliaments away. I wager not many of us will be in the House in 2040, such was the long-grassing of the commitment to finally get that introduced. However, it did not go far

enough because hybrid sales would still be ignored. The Government have said themselves that

“almost all new cars and vans sold need to be near-zero emission at the tailpipe by 2040”

if they are to hit their air quality targets.

The Government's lacklustre pledge was criticised by Mayors such as Sadiq Khan and Andy Street. We are in the slow lane when Britain should be leading. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South highlighted so expertly, the plan for the UK to ban petrol, diesel and most hybrid cars by 2040 has been watered down, with Ministers now referring to it as a “mission”, and the much trumpeted “Road to Zero” strategy has been plagued with delays. Perhaps the Minister could explain what a “mission” is. It is not quite a commitment, less than a pledge, certainly not legally binding, perhaps more than a hope and a prayer, but not quite a plan. A mission simply is not good enough.

The Secretary of State for Transport has cancelled rail electrification, something rightly criticised in the recent Transport Committee report. Without rail electrification projects, Britain's railways are still going to run on dirty diesel for many, many years to come.

We have heard today that the Government far too often work in silos. It is simply not good enough for DEFRA to push out press releases on air quality while the Department for Transport is busy pushing back commitments on diesel engines and cancelling electrification schemes. It does not have to be like this. Members have highlighted the urgent need for a clean air Act, and I am proud to say that Labour would introduce one. We will act on air pollution and deliver clean air for the many, not just the few. That really matters because, as the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire said, this is about social justice. The links are there for all to see between poverty and poor air quality, and between the injustices of poorer communities breathing in poor-quality air and the shame that far too little has been done to help them.

The fact that the poorest communities are hit by the worst air pollution should shame this Government and shame our society. This issue goes right to the heart of inequality: if someone is poorer, the air that they breathe is of a lower standard than the air breathed by someone richer. That should be simply unacceptable in 2018. We need to be bold and tackle this invisible threat head on. Communities throughout the UK are suffering now, and if we do not deal with this, we will leave future generations with poorer health, poorer outcomes and more pollution to deal with. That is simply not acceptable.

The Committee on Climate Change reported today, 10 years after the Climate Change Act was delivered by a Labour Government, and it has delivered a damning verdict on this Government's record. On air quality specifically, it doubles down on the point that we are not doing enough to modernise our transport sector, particularly the car industry. The report finds that the UK is on track to miss its legally binding carbon budgets in 2025 and 2030, due to lack of progress on cutting emissions from buildings and transport in particular. Lord Deben has said that the Government's pledge to end the sale of pure petrol and diesel cars by 2040 is not ambitious enough, and he believes it is essential that we move the target closer to 2030, as do the Opposition.

We are not short of soundbites or press releases from DEFRA about air quality, but I say to the Minister that it is not the presentation that is at fault; it is the content,

[Luke Pollard]

the substance, the plans, the action, the funding and the urgency. We all know what needs to be done, so I encourage him and his Department to get on with it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his maiden speech from the Dispatch Box.

3.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) on his excellent speech from the Dispatch Box; I am sure we will hear much more from him in the weeks and months ahead. Well done. Like many other Members, he raised very important issues.

I congratulate those Members who secured and took part in this debate, particularly the Chairs and Members of the four Select Committees, on their detailed and thoughtful joint report on this crucial issue. I recognise all the hard work that must have taken place to get four Select Committees to agree on a consistent position. That must be highly unusual, if not unprecedented. [Interruption.] I hear the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) say “exactly” from a sedentary position. It is because it is an important issue and we recognise that. I can reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) that the Government have an active programme to tackle this issue, and that there is plenty of oomph in the tank—[Interruption.] Yes, let’s go with the battery.

In January this year, showing our ambition, this Government published our 25-year environment plan, which set out our vision to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. As we leave the EU, we have committed to ensure that our environmental standards are not only maintained, but enhanced.

The very first goal that we set ourselves in the 25-year plan was clean air. Its importance is beyond question. Air pollution—whether from transport, domestic heating or agriculture—affects us all. It is the fourth biggest threat to public health in the UK, after cancer, obesity and heart disease, and that has been highlighted by many Members today, not least by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) and by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), and this Government are absolutely committed to tackling it.

There has been progress. Air pollution has reduced significantly since 2010: sulphur dioxide emissions are down by 60%, fine particulate matter, which we all have concerns about, has been reduced by 11%, and emissions of toxic nitrogen oxides are at their lowest level since records began. However, there is no doubt that more needs to be done, and that message has come across loud and clear from the eloquent contributions we have heard in this debate. We are doing more, and we will continue to do so.

We have committed £3.5 billion in funding already for cleaner air and cleaner transport. That money includes almost £1.5 billion to support the uptake of ultra low emission vehicles—one of the most comprehensive

programmes of support in the world. The UK is already acknowledged as a global leader in ultra low emission vehicles: one in eight battery electric cars sold in Europe in 2017 was made in the UK. We have said that we want every new car and van to be effectively zero emission by 2040 and that we will end the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by that date.

Lilian Greenwood: Has the Minister not reflected on the views of both the joint report of the Select Committees, which called for that date to be brought forward, and of Lord Deben who this morning talked about the Government’s climate change commitments and called again for that date to be brought forward to 2030. Are the Government not listening to the views that are being expressed?

David Rutley: We are listening. We have seriously considered the points that have been made, and this is an ambitious target. It is very much ahead of what is going on in other parts of the world. There are only six other countries that are ahead of us in proposing those targets.

Mary Creagh: A third of Norway’s vehicle fleet are electric vehicles—actual cars and not the bicycles that I was joking about earlier. It plans to ban the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2025. This is a country that was founded on the oil and gas industry and a country whose sovereign wealth fund is now withdrawing from all oil and gas investments. Why can we not show similar leadership in this country?

David Rutley: I understand the hon. Lady’s point. We are taking forward a very strong commitment. As I have said, only six other countries—

Mary Creagh rose—

David Rutley: If the hon. Lady will let me, I would like to answer her question. Only six other countries in the world are moving more quickly than the UK on ending petrol and diesel, and the UK is moving faster than almost every other country in the EU, as well as many other countries such as the US and Australia.

The £3.5 billion investment also includes £1.2 billion of available funding for the first ever statutory cycling and walking investment strategy. I know that that has been raised by a number of Members who have talked about what we can do to improve the take-up of cycling and walking. I think that, perhaps, there has been an over representation of the cycling lobby today. As a former member of the mountaineering all-party parliamentary group, the pinnacle of APPGs, we need to speak up for walkers as well. I know that the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) fully agrees with me on that important point.

Dr Whitford: Does the Minister recognise, however, the disparity between the cost to the Government through ill health and the amount that is being spent on active transport, be it cycling or walking?

David Rutley: There is more that we need to do, but the £1.2 billion funding in the cycling and walking investment strategy is a first important step, and we need to build on that—no question.

A number of important issues have been raised throughout the debate, and I will address some of them in the time remaining. One issue that has been highlighted is that of what we can do to help raise people's awareness of the health challenges around air quality. There were important contributions on this topic from my hon. Friends the Members for Erewash (Maggie Throup) and for South West Bedfordshire, the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), and the hon. Members for Wakefield, for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon). Through the clean air strategy, we are committed to a national information campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of air pollution. We will introduce a personal messaging system to ensure that those who are most at risk receive the information that they need about pollution risks. Public Health England is currently reviewing evidence of the effectiveness of different interventions, and will report its findings to Ministers later this year. This will include advice on the factors affecting behaviour change around air quality.

The Committees have called for a new clean air Act. As announced in our clean air strategy, we will set out new primary legislation to secure a more coherent legislative framework for action to tackle air pollution.

Neil Parish: The Minister talks about new legislation. Is that going to be a clean air Act? It is not quite clear.

David Rutley: I was just trying to explain what this new primary legislation would include. Perhaps I could progress so that my hon. Friend can see what this will lead to.

The new legislation will be underpinned by new England-wide powers to control major sources of pollution, plus new local powers to take action in areas with air pollution problems. For example, in our clean air strategy consultation we are seeking views on giving local authorities new powers to control emissions from domestic combustion, biomass and non-road mobile machinery.

Mary Creagh: What does the Minister think about wood-burning stoves?

David Rutley: A number of Members have mentioned the importance of tackling particulate matter. We need to look at all avenues, including wood-burning stoves. The Government have introduced programmes that help people to become more aware of the right wood to burn—that is, wood with a lower moisture content. We need to take this sort of approach to raise people's awareness, so that they can see what needs to be done to help reduce particulate matter.

I am conscious of the time available. Perhaps I could highlight some of the local issues that have been mentioned. The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth made some important points about anti-idling campaigns, and I recognise the good work that has been done in that area by Westminster City Council. There has been a lot of talk about electric bikes and what we must do to make people more aware of where they can and cannot use those cycles. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) was absolutely right to say that we need to look not only at emissions, but at tyres and brakes, because of the resulting particulate matter.

Neil Parish: Will the Minister give way?

David Rutley: For the last time, because I am conscious that I need to wind up very shortly.

Neil Parish: As we are talking about particulates and pollution from nitric oxide, what about the Volkswagen scandal? Why have we not got any money out of that company?

David Rutley: My hon. Friend knows, through his service on his Committee, that this is quite a complex issue. There are complex legal and jurisdictional matters that need to be addressed, particularly when it comes to the response to VW's wrongdoing.

Neil Parish: But it's the oomph, you see.

David Rutley: I hear "oomph" from a sedentary position; I will not respond to that again. The vast majority of the potential wrongdoing in the case my hon. Friend mentions occurred in Germany, and the German Government have held VW to account there. There are different regulations in the United States, meaning that it is easier for the US authorities to secure funding from there. We want to ensure that the automotive industry makes more of a contribution.

We need to work in partnership to tackle the problem that we have discussed today, and we are absolutely committed to doing that. We want to work across all levels of government, as has been highlighted today, and with local authorities, businesses, farmers, industry and households to tackle air pollution. I know that there is real enthusiasm across the House, and we need to use that momentum to good effect. I would like to conclude by recognising the important contribution made by the joint inquiry's report and pay tribute to the quality of the speeches we have heard today. The House can be assured that the Government will continue to engage with the Select Committees on this vital issue in the months ahead.

3.50 pm

Neil Parish: I would like to thank all Members for their contributions this afternoon. This House is at its best when we work across the parties and across Committees, as we have done to deliver this verdict on air quality. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) said, the Government want to leave this country and this planet in a better environmental condition than we found them in, and air quality is essential in delivering that. If we are going to deliver a better quality of life for poor and rich alike, we have to make sure that we tackle air quality.

We have had contributions from Members representing urban areas where there is a concentration of pollution, and we must deal with those hotspots. We have also had contributions from Members representing rural areas where roads and other things are causing real problems in towns. We have to make sure that our planning system for not only roads but housing takes account of the need to increase air quality and get rid of pollution.

Working together, we can deliver this. We want to see this Government and others go forward. The Secretary of State is very keen to deliver a much cleaner environment. We must now concentrate on air quality, and not only on transport, bikes and walking but all the ways in

[Neil Parish]

which we can put this right. I thank everybody who has contributed to the debate. I think we will make a difference, and we must.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Joint Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Environmental Audit, Health and Social Care and Transport Committees, Improving Air Quality, HC 433, and calls on the Government to adopt its recommendations as part of its Clean Air Strategy.

Advisory Committee on Business Appointments

[*Relevant Documents: Fourth Special Report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Managing Ministers' and officials' conflicts of interest: time for clearer values, principles and action: Government Response to the Committee's Thirteenth Report of Session 2016 -17, HC 731.*]

3.52 pm

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con):
I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Thirteenth Report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, HC 252, Managing Ministers' and officials' conflicts of interest: time for clearer values, principles and action, on the role and effectiveness of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACoBA); notes that ACoBA regulates applications for business appointments by former Ministers and civil servants who have recently left the public sector; believes that ACoBA is an ineffectual regulator which fails to inspire public confidence or respect; expresses concern that the Committee's inquiry revealed numerous gaps in ACoBA's monitoring process with insufficient attention paid to the principles that should govern business appointments; agrees that failures of consecutive governments to address ACoBA's deficiencies have damaged public trust in politics and public institutions and led to repeated scandals; calls on the Government to bring forward major reform by introducing a principles-based system to ensure that individuals act with integrity and behave according to those principles; and further calls on the Government to fund independent checks by ACoBA across all Government departments and executive agencies to reinforce those principles.

It is the role of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee to oversee the UK's changing constitution and the efficiency of the civil service and the machinery of government. Within that, PACAC covers matters of ethics and propriety in Whitehall, overseeing the work of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the ministerial code, the special advisers code, the civil service code and the work of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, which oversees the rules governing departing Ministers and Crown servants when they take up outside appointments. PACAC has defined its overriding purpose, to quote from our website:

“to conduct robust and effective scrutiny in order to help create conditions where the public can have justified confidence in public services/government.”

In that context, just before the election, PACAC published a new report on ACoBA, entitled “Managing Ministers' and officials' conflicts of interest: time for clearer values, principles and action”.

In this House we do not work for ourselves. Our system of government relies on the principle that we who are intertwined with power act only when it is in the public and national interest. The vast majority of public servants do their best, and I certainly understand that. The business appointment rules exist to prevent the conflicts of interest that can arise when former Ministers, special advisers or officials—especially those with high-level Government experience—are looking to take up appointments in the private sector. I am afraid that there are rightly public concerns when senior officials move directly into sectors over which they had until recently had control and influence, including suspicions that the decisions they took may have been influenced

by the hope or expectation of future employment or that a future employer could use official information that they had access to.

The Advisory Committee on Business Appointments—or ACoBA, as it is known for short—is appointed by the Government to advise on the implementation of these rules. The ministerial code requires former Ministers, for two years after leaving office, to consult ACoBA about any employment or consultancy they are looking to take up. ACoBA may recommend that an individual wait for up to two years before taking up a specific appointment, or that they do not undertake types of work falling into specific categories up to the two-year limit. However, the business rules themselves are largely procedural: they do not make explicit when or how former Ministers or officials can or cannot legitimately make use of their prior experience.

In 2014, the rules were updated so that only officials at director general, or equivalent, and above now need to apply to ACoBA. Senior grades below that level are now managed by individual Departments and agencies. There was also a change to retrospective applications, which are no longer accepted. Having to make a decision after a contract had been signed and an appointment taken up was seen as a possible constraint on ACoBA's scope to advise, because how could it advise on something that had already happened? The updated rules also allowed Departments to continue to pay former officials and special advisers who are required to observe a quarantine period before taking up their new roles. ACoBA has stated that whether or not this pay is available, it will not affect its decision.

PACAC, which I chair, has concluded that ACoBA is a “toothless regulator”. There are serious problems with the system as it currently operates. A number of these problems are institutional, deriving from ACoBA's structure and the practical realities of how it must function. I wish to make it absolutely clear in this debate that I am not making any personal criticism of the chair or any members of ACoBA. The committee comprises both political appointments and independent members. However, despite Baroness Browning, its chair, telling PACAC that she wanted

“every bus driver and hairdresser...to apply”

to be an independent member of ACoBA, its composition remains dominated by the great and the good. This is unsurprising given that the criteria for the role include senior level experience in the civil service, the military or business, which is hardly something possessed by most bus drivers or hairdressers. Furthermore, independent members also hold senior posts in the sorts of companies in which those applying to ACoBA may well be seeking to gain employment. There are notable examples of when these independent members have failed to recuse themselves, despite what would appear to be obvious conflicts of interest when considering cases.

Moreover, for lower grades of civil servant—their applications are managed not by ACoBA, but by their own Departments or agencies—what is known as the revolving door is essentially self-regulating. It is not impossible that civil servants, knowing any precedent they set by judging on a particular case might have an impact on their later careers, could unintentionally or otherwise approve appointments that perhaps deserved more scrutiny. However, civil servants in lower grades can still have significant influence in areas where potential

conflicts of interest could arise, such as policy development or procurement decisions. Some may have had senior responsible owner roles, where they have taken responsibility for the management of substantial projects with sizeable budgets, and the private sector finds such experience very valuable. With the increasing interchange between Whitehall Departments and the private sector, this problem is growing.

Putting the problems of scope and propriety to one side, ACoBA simply lacks the powers to allow it to do its job effectively. As the advisory part of its name suggests, ACoBA cannot prevent an individual taking up an appointment, and it has no power to sanction anyone who ignores its recommendations. It makes a recommendation only when an appointment has been accepted, and does not make *ex ante* stipulations about the types of employment an individual may or may not engage in. It therefore relies on individuals coming to it for advice or with an application. It has very little capacity to investigate those who do not do so or to monitor non-compliance. We were told that ACoBA found that LinkedIn was a more comprehensive source of the employment histories of former officials than the disclosures of those officials themselves.

With resources failing to keep pace with ACoBA's increased caseload, this embarrassing state of affairs is unlikely to change, meaning that a body intended to improve public trust in government will have to continue to trawl social media for vital information. Evidence shows that ACoBA is simply not being taken seriously. Frequently, applicants have taken up their role before ACoBA has considered their case and made any recommendations, and sometimes these recommendations are simply ignored. We were told that too many former Ministers and officials viewed ACoBA as a rubber stamp before pursuing a lucrative corporate career that might be perceived to conflict with their previous public responsibilities.

Departments take responsibility for those below ACoBA's threshold, but we were told that monitoring was inconsistent and some agencies failed to publish the required data completely. There is evidence that this can result in too close a relationship between certain Departments and the companies working in related industries. Freedom of information requests in 2012 found that more than 3,500 former senior military officers and Ministry of Defence officials had been approved for arms company jobs since 1996. There might be nothing intrinsically wrong with those appointments, but the failure to have any sanction over them results in a lack of public confidence.

In the absence of a robust system of regulation, high-profile cases, such as that of the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, threaten public confidence in the integrity of government. I make no comment about Mr Osborne, but after leaving government he accepted a post with the BlackRock Investment Institute, part of the investment management company the BlackRock Investment Group. As Chancellor, he had had contact with BlackRock and its competitors in the field. Significantly, as Chancellor, he had introduced the Taxation of Pensions Act 2014, which materially benefited BlackRock.

Our report made no comment on Mr Osborne's conduct, except to document that he had taken up the appointment, but it raises questions about how effective

[Sir Bernard Jenkin]

the system of regulation is, because it does not inspire public confidence. He complied with the business appointment rules for former Ministers, and ACoBA considered his case, but because the current process commands so little confidence, its decision to approve the appointment has been questioned, and it has done little to enhance his reputation to have ACoBA as a protection. Among Mr Osborne's other post-ministerial appointments is his editorship of the *Evening Standard*, a position he accepted without waiting for ACoBA to reach a decision at all. This might have been for perfectly understandable reasons.

Our report made a number of recommendations that would improve the confidence ACoBA commands but crucially without recourse to a statutory system. These related to the availability of data for those below the threshold for ACoBA review, the transparency of the lobbying process and the need for ACoBA to be adequately resourced. Crucially, underpinning all this, we concluded that there needed to be a clear statement of values and a clear setting out of principles to be talked about, taught and discussed, to inform and guide behaviour and to make it clear when behaviour falls below those standards.

I am very disappointed that in their response the Government rejected all but some minor procedural recommendations and even denied the seriousness of the problems we are confronting in the House of Commons today. We agreed with ACoBA when it said there should be a single collated list of decisions taken by Departments and agencies so that at least the self-regulated departmental aspect might be more exposed to public view. The Government rejected even this minor suggestion.

PACAC—and before it the Public Administration Select Committee—has returned to the subject of ACoBA and will keep returning to it, because the system remains ineffective and fails to command public confidence. The problems it is supposed to address have only escalated over this period. Governments have failed to address our concerns and public trust in the system has continued to decline. To restore public trust, it is crucial to stamp out not only impropriety by senior Ministers and officials, but the appearance of impropriety. ACoBA, although well intentioned, lacks the resources and structures to achieve that.

I hope the Government will pay attention to this. I do understand that this is a very difficult matter to address. The Committee on Standards in Public Life, I believe, should be having a look at this. As the Government consider the appointment of the Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life—I may have a role in that—I hope that it will be made clear to the new Chair that this is an issue that should be looked at. Perhaps the Committee on Standards in Public Life will conclude, in the same way as the Government, that there is no need for any significant change, but I think the matter deserves scrutiny.

One detects a kind of squeamishness in Whitehall among Ministers and senior officials, whom this question directly affects because they will soon, in their careers, be leaving public office and moving to the private sector. One detects that there is a reluctance to confront this issue, perhaps for the worst of reasons, which rather undermines public confidence in the system as it exists today. I am afraid it is an ineffective and poorly trusted regulator, which is probably worse than no regulator at all.

4.5 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): I am pleased to support the report. I commend the Chairman for his excellent speech. I have for a long time been concerned about public confidence in politicians and the state of Government, and it is very important indeed that we get it across that we are, overwhelmingly, honest people, trying to do the right thing by our constituents and by the country to improve everyone's lives. But there are those who are not.

I am taken back to when I was first elected as a councillor, many years ago—1972 to be precise—and I was challenged outside a public meeting in my ward by a scrap metal merchant. He said, "Look mate, we are all on the fiddle, aren't we?" I said, "No, actually; I am not on the fiddle." He said, "No, not you—them others." I said, "Which others? If you give me their names I shall report them to the chief executive." He said, "No, not the councillors—the officers." I said, "That is even worse. If you know names of officers who are 'on the fiddle' as you put it, I shall certainly report them to the chief executive." He walked away in disbelief; he thought I was going to say, "Of course I am on the fiddle, mate. Have you got any backhanders for me?" That is not how things work, but some people suspect that that is how it works.

More recently, a couple of years ago, there were some television stings on Members. One was absolutely astonishing. One Member openly said, "Yes, I am for hire, like a taxi." Another said they would be prepared to work for, I think, £5,000 a day. It was astonishing—Members whom I knew. I had no idea that was how they thought.

We are well paid and have good pensions. I believe that our job is to represent the interests of ordinary people, not ourselves, or indeed the interests of business. ACOBA, as the Chairman rightly said, is toothless and feeble. I am a member of the Public Administration Committee. There are those on the Committee who fulminate, almost, at what has been going on. I feel just as strongly. The report moves us forward and the Government must act at some point. I personally believe that the rules should be much stronger and rigorously enforced to ensure that everyone believes that our politics are honest and straight.

4.8 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I shall not be too long on my feet. A lot of the points I wanted to raise have already been covered and I have torn a cartilage in my right knee, so I am feeling the pain as I speak.

In the report there is a quote from the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee report of 2017, which mirrors closely a comment by its predecessor, the Public Administration Committee from 2012 when it says:

"The regulatory system for scrutinising the post-public employment of former Ministers and civil servants is ineffectual and does not inspire public confidence or respect. Our inquiry has revealed numerous gaps in ACoBA's monitoring process with insufficient attention paid to the principles that should govern business appointments. The failures of governments in this regard have damaged public trust in politics and public institutions and led to repeated scandals. Consequently, we are recommending major reform."

Since 2012, nothing seems to have improved. The failure of ACoBA to keep a lid on the revolving doors between Government and industry, including seeing the most senior Ministers take on jobs without waiting for approval, means that a system relying solely on the honour of former Ministers, without sanctions or consequences, is seen as optional and has now failed.

As the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) mentioned, the situation with George Osborne has been particularly worrying. That the former Chancellor of the Exchequer has been taken on as an adviser to the BlackRock Investment Institute on a salary considerably in excess of his previous salary as Chancellor, in a sector that he was responsible for regulating, seems to show little care for even the appearance of propriety among Ministers. That the body that was supposed to be regulating the revolving doors between Government and industry had to hear that he had accepted a high-profile position as editor of the *Evening Standard* in the news, without him having consulted them or waited for clearance, shows that the system is broken. That the president of BlackRock could tell investors that there is no way of knowing whether Mr Osborne will

“draw on (or disclose or use for the benefit of yourself or the organisation to which this advice refers) any privileged information” that he gained from his time in Government shows that this is an absolute mockery.

As the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex said, the ACoBA chair, Baroness Browning, said to the Committee

“every bus driver and hairdresser you know” should

“apply for any of those jobs. I can tell you factually, not one applied.”

Well, that is not surprising when the essential criteria for such a role include senior-level experience of at least one of the following sectors: the diplomatic service, the military or business. The criteria go on to mention

“Understanding of the machinery of government, preferably gained through practical experience at a senior level...Good communications skills...Personal integrity and strength of character”.

The report states:

“While the majority of these characteristics are not beyond your average hairdresser or bus driver, the first criteria, namely senior level experience in the Diplomatic Service, Military or business, may restrict applications from outside these sectors.”

Further, it was found that the problems identified in the system are “escalating” with increased numbers of public servants moving between the public and private sectors, with a number of high-profile cases resulting in a decline in public confidence in the system. Research by the High Pay Centre states that between 2000 and 2014, 600 former Ministers and top-level civil servants were appointed to over 1,000 different business roles. Its report raised concerns about the “corporate colonisation” of UK politics. *Private Eye’s* Richard Brooks told PACAC that

“former senior officials and their new employers see the”

ACoBA

“process as a mere rubber stamp”.

On what scale is this happening? In 2010-11, immediately following the general election, ACoBA advised 42 former Ministers regarding 95 applications and 38 civil servants regarding 63 applications. In 2015-16, immediately after

that general election, the equivalent figure was 33 Ministers regarding 123 applications and 36 Crown servants in relation to 110 appointments.

Since 2010, no former Ministers or civil servants have had an application refused by ACoBA—not one, nada, zilch, zero. *Private Eye* reported that by 2015, outsourcing public services cost the UK Government £120 billion and that despite poor records of delivery, G4S and Serco continue to win favour and contracts because of the revolving door and blurred distinction between employees in private companies and ministerial Departments.

Finally, the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), who unfortunately cannot be in his seat today, described ACoBA as

“nothing but a poodle without teeth or claws, bark or bite...totally and utterly useless”.—[*Official Report*, 28 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1567.]

I could not have put it better myself. If he is watching today, we miss him and haste him back. The report recommends only a cost-benefit analysis. I would go further and say that a statutory basis for ACoBA is necessary for its continued existence, otherwise it will rightly be seen entirely as decorative.

4.14 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) on his recent knighthood, richly deserved after many years’ service in this place, and on the work of the Committee and the dogged way in which he and his Committee have gone after this particular issue. It is a lesson to all in the House about the value and the strength of Select Committees when they are well led and follow the evidence with robust questioning. I pay tribute to him and his Committee.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his tribute, but may I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan)? We really do owe much of our work to the persistence of our absent friend, the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), who has always contributed and motivated the Committee on this matter.

Christian Matheson: I am most grateful for that clarification and the House will have noted it.

The Advisory Committee on Business Appointments is entirely necessary, but, to use the phrase of the moment, not at all fit for purpose. The clue is in the name. The A in ACoBA stands for “advisory” and it is clear that the committee is just that: it has no teeth and if its harshest sanction is to embarrass—well, that is scarcely a sanction at all. I wonder whether, as currently constituted, it is even designed to make a difference with a very narrow remit. As far as I can tell, ACoBA has never actually refused an appointment.

ACoBA is appointed by the Government to provide independent advice to senior Crown servants and to all former Ministers of the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments on any appointments they wish to take up within two years of leaving public or ministerial office. ACoBA applies the business appointment rules, which are largely procedural and set by the Government.

[Christian Matheson]

They have no statutory basis and there are no sanctions for non-compliance. The rules apply for up to two years after leaving office and they are applied with inconsistency.

It is a clear failure of ACOBA that it cannot adequately distinguish between different types of post-ministerial appointment, for example paid as opposed to unpaid work. One former senior civil servant recounted to me the story of when they left the civil service. They took a position on the board of trustees of a community group. It took months upon months for this voluntary position to be approved. Part of the delay was down to due diligence, because the trust was a charity. If charities and the Charity Commission can undertake due diligence and prevent an appointment pending such checks, why can ACOBA not do that?

Meanwhile, as we have heard, the former Chancellor George Osborne can take a job with BlackRock in the City of London and not even tell ACOBA that he was taking a job editing the London *Evening Standard*. I understand the same applies to the former head of GCHQ, Robert Hannigan, who was appointed to the European advisory board for a new US cyber-security firm, BlueteamGlobal, and did not even tell ACOBA. Because it is set up as an advisory and non-statutory committee, ACOBA finds enforcement difficult. I suspect that this is the reason it does not attempt to enforce. Indeed, it may be the reason it was set up in this way in the first place.

In addition to ACOBA's toothlessness, there are further problems, for example with conflicts of interest. There are numerous, multiple examples of members of the committee declaring interests in firms to which the applicants were being appointed, but not recusing themselves from those cases. This included Mary Jo Jacobi, who has financial interests in BP but did not recuse herself from Vernon Gibson's application, and John Wood, who has interests in BT, did not recuse himself from Keith Bristow's commission with them.

ACOBA was also criticised by the former Public Administration Committee for having an "establishment" make-up—the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex raised this point. ACOBA is chaired by a Baroness and former Conservative Minister, who also works as a consultant for a company that looks very much like a lobbying firm. Other members of the committee include two Lords, a knight, a former general secretary of the First Division Association, lawyers and former senior civil service grandees. I go back to the evidence cited by the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee about bus drivers or hairdressers. As he says, there seems to be no sight of them.

Kelvin Hopkins: My hon. Friend is making the point made by the Chair and other colleagues. Putting people on ACOBA who look like members of the establishment, honest though they may be, just reinforces the image among the public of the establishment looking after itself, instead of having ordinary people, maybe bus drivers and hairdressers, who are remote from the establishment on the committee.

Christian Matheson: I thank my hon. Friend for that point, but it is not simply about image. It is about having a different perspective. It is about approaching

the question of an appointment from a different point of view, so that somebody from the outside, a bus driver or a hairdresser, can say, "Look, this really doesn't look right from where I am sitting." He makes an extremely good point, but the issue is about more than how it looks.

We welcome much of the report, including its finding that the problem of conflicts of interest

"has escalated, with increased numbers of public servants moving between the public and private sectors, and a number of very high profile cases resulting in declining public confidence in a system that was set up to command trust by mitigating any breaches of the Rules."

It also states:

"The regulatory system for scrutinising the post public employment of former Ministers and civil servants is ineffectual and does not inspire public confidence or respect."

It refers to

"numerous gaps in ACoBA's monitoring process with insufficient attention paid to the principles that should govern business appointments."

The report has several clear and pretty strong recommendations for ACOBA, including much greater transparency of data published about decisions, an amendment to the Ministerial Code, and the publication of applications on receipt and not after the fact. It also proposes the disclosure of full information about ACOBA's procedures for assessing applications and the reasons for its judgments.

Labour Members welcome the report as a starting point for the reform of ACOBA, but I disagree with the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex, who said—although I may have misunderstood him—that reform might be quite difficult. I am not sure that it would be if enough attention were given to it, and as long as the political will was there, although I concede that he, rather than me, is the one who has done all the studying of the detail.

We have been calling for the reform of ACOBA since 2011. Whether the issue is the lack of diversity of its members, their own conflicts of interest, or indeed the very rules by which they work—or, indeed, do not work—it cannot continue to exist as a fig leaf that fails even in that role of concealing the revolving door. It should be entirely reconstituted, with clearer terms of reference and stronger powers to delay or block appointments that are not appropriate. By failing to act, or being unable to act, ACOBA highlights the fact that the current arrangements are simply not working, and it must be reformed.

4.21 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I thank all the Members who have spoken today. I am, obviously, particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), and, through him, I thank his Committee for its examination of this issue over time. Obviously, the Government welcome the opportunity to respond formally to its most recent report on this subject. That report stands. I trust that Members have had a chance to read it in detail today. I have also been able to listen to the points that have been made during the debate. Let me now set out how the Government see ACoBA, and, in doing so, try to address some of those points.

ACoBA fulfils a specific remit: to supply independent, impartial advice on the business appointment rules to former Ministers and civil servants on proposed new

appointments of people who have left Government service. It supplies its advice directly to former Ministers and, in the case of civil servants, to either the Prime Minister or the relevant permanent secretary. It remains the Government's view that it fulfils its remit effectively, efficiently and with professionalism. It comprises nine very knowledgeable individuals, independent of Government, who bring with them a wealth of experience from the public, private and third sectors.

The business appointment rules system itself is a set of principles which seeks to ensure that, when a former Minister or civil servant takes up an outside appointment, there is no justified public concern about that appointment. We do think, though, that people have a right to earn a living after leaving Government, perhaps in areas in which they have established expertise. When applying the rules, the system should strike a balance, ensuring that there is public confidence, but also ensuring that the conditions do not amount to an unlawful or unenforceable restraint of trade.

Kelvin Hopkins: It is fair enough that, when people leave the House, or leave Government jobs, they should be able to earn a living, but not necessarily in the area in which they previously worked, from which they could benefit through their inside knowledge, or in which they might even have influenced policy in the expectation of a subsequent reward. That is what is wrong. If someone who was in the MOD then gets a job as a schoolteacher, that is not a problem; if they get a job ordering supplies for the military, that is a different matter.

Chloe Smith: I think that the hon. Gentleman and I are in agreement, because that is the guiding principle of this structure. There should be able to be public confidence that abuses are not occurring. There was a clue, I think, in his choice of words. He may have involuntarily used the words "not necessarily", but there is something rather important in that. We have a flexible system that means that there is the ability to make a decision not necessarily in one fashion or another. That is one of the advantages of having a non-statutory body—it can be a little more flexible, in a way that is different from something that is encased in legislation, where the words "necessarily this" or "necessarily that" may apply.

Kelvin Hopkins: I hope that the hon. Lady is not reading too much into my words. In my short speech, I said that I wanted strong rules, rigidly enforced. That is the way it should be. There should be an entire separation between what a Minister does in government and what they do after they leave Parliament.

Chloe Smith: I hear and respect the hon. Gentleman's view and I am grateful to him for taking the trouble to repeat it.

One of the other principles at stake is that we do not want to deter talented people from entering government service. I suspect that the Committee also recognised that principle, quite rightly. In the Government's view, that could result from having an over-rigid system that could prevent or restrict people from returning to the sectors in which their expertise lies appropriately following a period of public service. Now, more than ever, with some major challenges in view for the public sector and for the civil service, we need to be able to attract the best skills and talent and to benefit from those who have capabilities and experience from outside the civil service—let us not forget this argument works two ways.

In order to deliver for the public and for taxpayers in the way in which they expect of their civil service, we need to be able to maintain a confident, professional and expert service when we are looking at such important and critical matters in the public sector.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: My hon. Friend knows that the PASC report of 2012 recommended a statutory scheme. In this later report, having listened to the Government's objections about the cost-effectiveness of a statutory scheme, we invited the Government to produce a cost-benefit analysis, which indeed even the chair of ACoBA said would be a good idea. However, the Government have declined to produce even a cost-benefit analysis of having statutory rules, or enforceable rules of some kind. Will she revisit that recommendation and look at the question of a cost-benefit analysis? We are constantly told that rules would have a very negative effect on the public sector, but there is no evidence to support what she is claiming—although I understand that there is a perfectly legitimate concern.

Chloe Smith: I thank the Chairman of the Committee for that intervention. He gives me the opportunity to note that these arguments have been put back and forth a number of times over the years. It is my great pleasure to come to the House today and take up those arguments. However, it is still the Government's case that a statutory system is not the right way forward. That is a matter of principle as much as of practicality, for the reasons I have set out. We do not therefore think it is right to go ahead and do a cost-benefit analysis, which, in itself, would take time and money, for something that, in principle, we are not convinced of the case for. It is question of principle and practicality.

We need to be able to attract capable people from a range of backgrounds, and I reiterate the commitment to being able to recruit fully externally to do that. It is therefore important to have an interchange of skills and experience between the public sector and elsewhere. That is good for our national life. It is also a matter of fairness to individuals who will wish to continue their careers in various ways. We need to strike that balance.

As I said, we remain of the view that a statutory system with enforcement powers but without the flexibility of the current arrangements to take account of the particular circumstances of individual cases would not be beneficial. As I have just said to my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex, we do not consider carrying out that cost-benefit analysis on the introduction of such a system to be a good use of public money at this time.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: My hon. Friend is being very patient, but unfortunately for her she has a lot of time. If she is going to refuse a cost-benefit analysis, will she at least accept this? ACoBA seems to be very preoccupied by what candidates might do after they have left the public sector in the context of their employers, and it often puts a lobbying ban on the person moving into the private sector. What regard should ACoBA have for the fact that the lobbying has already probably taken place and the granting of employment is just the implicit reward for having been lobbied when the candidate was working in the public sector? No regard seems to be paid to that potential conflict of interest in the way the ACoBA rules are applied.

Chloe Smith: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which is, I suppose, at the other end of the process. Although it is ACoBA's remit to look at the exit end of the process, the entry end is also bound around with codes of conduct—the ministerial code and the codes of conduct expected of civil servants. Crucial to those are of course the principles of public life. While we are on the subject of principles that govern what we are talking about here, I should say that we expect a high degree of principles and of ethical behaviour from anybody who comes in to work for the public sector—that is the least that both their employer and the taxpayer expect. However, I wonder whether it would ever be feasible to systematise that and have someone checking every dot on the i and cross on the t of how that could be done. That is a slightly different part of the process from the one we would be looking to ACoBA to deal with.

I did want to talk about transparency, because it is one way in which we can also look to gain accountability in the area of appointments after public service. ACoBA publishes a considerable amount of information on the applications it receives, and Departments do the same where it is their responsibility to do so. That advice is published online, in full, once an appointment is taken up, and Departments publish summary information regarding civil servants' applications on a quarterly basis. What those methods do is very important. They provide a reputational check and balance. Hypothetically speaking, if I were a future employer of somebody and I felt they had not been honest about something which I could very easily scrutinise, I might think twice about employing them. We have a clear and open system, and it has a very human point at its heart. The Government believe that is helpful and sufficient to ensure that the public have the information they need for transparency and accountability purposes.

We have noted in our responses to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee's previous reports on this issue that there are certain areas where the current system may be tightened, and I would like to go into those now in order to outline to Committee members and others who are here this afternoon the changes we have made. First, the ministerial code is clear that Ministers of the Crown are expected to behave in a way that upholds the highest standards of propriety. The code contains an explicit prohibition on former Ministers from lobbying Government for two years following their departure from office, and they must also seek advice from ACoBA about any outside appointments and abide by that advice. To reinforce that requirement, the most recent version of the code appends a full version of the rules and includes new wording to make it clear that new appointments should not be taken up or announced until ACoBA has had the opportunity to provide its advice. Hon. Members will find that important in the context of examples they have given this afternoon.

In addition, the Minister for the Cabinet Office has recently written to ministerial colleagues reminding them of the importance of the business appointment rules in maintaining public confidence in the integrity of our public servants. We have also taken steps to improve awareness of our compliance with the rules at departmental level and to improve Departments' monitoring of compliance issues. These actions are largely in response to recommendations made by my hon. Friend's Select

Committee in its latest report on this issue, and I thank him and the Committee for their continued interest. I particularly wanted to be able to set out today how we have made those changes and the way in which they take the issue forward.

The Cabinet Office has also recently issued updated guidance to Departments on administering the rules on working with ACoBA. This guidance includes a number of new points, including increasing clarity on how the rules apply to civil servants on career breaks, ensuring that all applications from former permanent secretaries are countersigned by the Cabinet Secretary and encouraging Departments to consider an individual's compliance with the business appointment rules in the future, should they wish to return to Government service. *[Interruption.]* Dangerously, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am now going to pause for a glass of water. I await a heavyweight intervention from the Chair of the Select Committee. However, none is forthcoming. *[Interruption.]* I shall now complete my remarks, so that the House can move on to the important matters that await it in the next debate.

In addition, if a former Minister or senior civil servant is nominated for an honour, ACoBA will be consulted on an individual's compliance with the business appointment rules as part of the honours and appointments secretariat's existing vetting process. Finally, the chief executive of the civil service and the Government lead non-executive have written to the chairs of each of the departmental audit and risk committees, requiring them to monitor on a quarterly basis a Department's performance on ensuring compliance with the business appointment rules. In our view, the amendments that I have listed for the House today, which will also be incorporated into the civil service management code in due course, will help to tighten and strengthen the processes that underpin the subject of today's debate. They will also raise awareness and improve compliance with the rules.

In summary—*[Interruption.]* All I need is for some scenery to begin to collapse behind me; then I would have had the perfect afternoon in the Chamber. In summary, in the Government's view, ACoBA's primary role is, and should remain, to provide independent advice on the application of the business appointment rules on outside appointments to Ministers and the most senior Crown servants after they leave office. The Government's view remains that the current rules strike the right balance between preventing conflicts of interest and recognising the necessary freedom of individuals to earn a living without unreasonable hindrance after they leave public service.

4.37 pm

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I am grateful for the attention that my hon. Friend has given this matter. I know that it is a matter over which to agonise, because it contains a lot of dilemmas. She has put forward extremely powerfully all the countervailing points about how to attract people into the public service and how not to punish them in the afterlife for giving up the salary and perks of the private sector to work in the public service, and so on.

The Minister has also talked a lot about processes and transparency, and I suggest that there is one process that would really open this up. That process would involve applications being published at the outset. I know that this is an advisory committee and that people

go there for advice, but it really is ridiculous that they can go there on a fishing expedition. The advisory committee could tell someone that they could not possibly take a certain job because of what might happen, but nothing would ever appear in the public domain to indicate that that person had no moral compass of their own. Let them go and take advice from a lawyer about how the rules would be applied, but once they have applied to ACoBA, let it be transparent that they have applied. Let us find out what sort of person they are and whether they are applying for a job in a way that should not be allowed.

My second point is more about principles. In paragraph 105 of our report, we recommend a change to the civil service code, which should also be made to the ministerial code. Our recommendation is quite simple, and it is that these words should be included:

“You must: take decisions in the public interest alone; never allow yourself to be influenced in contracting, procurement, regulation or the provision of policy advice, by your career expectations or prospects if you leave the public service; always report to your line managers any offers of jobs or other rewards, or any informal suggestions of such rewards, that may have, or be reasonably seen to have a bearing on your role as a public servant; take particular care in your relations with former colleagues who may seek to influence your decisions as a public servant. You must not: take up any post outside the public service in business or [commercial] organisations operating in areas where you have been directly responsible in the previous [currently] two years for any form of contracting, procurement or regulation.”

We believe that that would provide a framework for people to think about what they are doing in the public service and at least some basis for discussion about how we expect people to behave. Sadly, leaving a Government Department, whether as a Minister, official or member of the armed forces, and, in time, finding oneself in related work in the private sector, has become something of a way of life. It is the new normal.

Unless we can find a way of providing reassurance about such behaviour, we will finish up with a statutory system in the end. I invite the Minister to reconsider that particular recommendation. I appreciate the opportunity to raise these matters this afternoon. They will not go away, I am afraid—they will be back, unless the Government take action.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Thirteenth Report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, HC 252, Managing Ministers’ and officials’ conflicts of interest: time for clearer values, principles and action, on the role and effectiveness of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACoBA); notes that ACoBA regulates applications for business appointments by former Ministers and civil servants who have recently left the public sector; believes that ACoBA is an ineffectual regulator which fails to inspire public confidence or respect; expresses concern that the Committee’s inquiry revealed numerous gaps in ACoBA’s monitoring process with insufficient attention paid to the principles that should govern business appointments; agrees that failures of consecutive governments to address ACoBA’s deficiencies have damaged public trust in politics and public institutions and led to repeated scandals; calls on the Government to bring forward major reform by introducing a principles-based system to ensure that individuals act with integrity and behave according to those principles; and further calls on the Government to fund independent checks by ACoBA across all Government departments and executive agencies to reinforce those principles.

PETITION

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

4.41 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I would be the first to say that Ealing has some great schools; I know that as I am a product of them myself, I use them as a mum, and I am the sort of MP who goes to assemblies. I will go to my first school fête on Saturday—at Montpellier School, my old primary.

However, I also recognise that the formal school system is not for everyone, and that is what this petition is about. It has been spearheaded by Jackie Fahy of Chiswick and is backed by people from all over my constituency—the Freely family of Ealing, the Carberry family of Acton, Elizabeth Howard, Sarah Bignell and loads of other people. Their issue is about safeguards for people who home-educate their kids and the need for there not to be overbearing regulation. I understand that this is the first such petition of hundreds that have been received by Members on both sides of the House; I just seem to have been the first to have got here.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidelines and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidelines and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002164]

Armed Forces Veterans

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Kelly Tollhurst.*)

4.43 pm

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): I relish this opportunity to raise this important issue, which is hugely significant—not only to my constituents in North Devon, but across the country. It is, of course, extremely significant at the moment, during the lead-up to Armed Forces Day on Saturday.

It is worth saying, perhaps for the benefit of those watching these proceedings from outside, that no inference should be drawn from the, sadly, rather small number of colleagues in the House today. That is absolutely not a reflection of the extraordinarily high regard in which all Members view members of the armed forces and veterans; it is purely, I am afraid, a product of the parliamentary timetable and the fact that many colleagues will now be on their way to their constituencies to take part in events for Armed Forces Day this weekend.

I start on a personal note by sharing my own grandfather's story. He fought in the great war and enrolled at the start of the conflict. He told the Army that he was born in 1895. When he passed away 60 years later, we discovered the truth: he had lied about his age. He was so eager to serve King and country that he had signed up as a 15-year-old boy.

One hundred years after the end of the first world war, I am now the proud custodian of my grandfather's service medals and ribbons, but I am ashamed to say that we know nothing else of his part in the conflict. Like many of his generation, he never talked about it. He was alive until I was 10 years old, but I do not recall having a single conversation with him about his part in the war—that is just the way it was for that generation.

How times have changed, and rightly so. Today we are far more aware of the service of our armed forces veterans. We understand much better the challenges they face, and we openly acknowledge the debt of gratitude we owe them, but with that greater understanding comes difficult questions—questions about whether society and the state are doing enough to support our veterans and to provide them with the assistance they need and deserve. That is the focus of my thoughts today.

There are around 2.5 million veterans in the UK. It depends on how we count, but that is the best figure. My county of Devon has the highest number of veterans as a proportion of its population of any county in the UK. We have some 100,000 veterans living in Devon. Many of them are in my constituency of North Devon, where of course we have a very proud historical connection with the military. It is the home of Royal Marines Base Chivenor, which my right hon. Friend the Minister visited earlier this year. Until recently, we also had an Army base at Fremington. There is also a military establishment at Instow.

North Devon is also home to veterans who have served in many military establishments across Devon and, indeed, the rest of the south-west. It has a proud historical connection with the armed services, so I take a particular interest in all these matters.

The centrepiece of our country's contract with our armed services veterans is the armed forces covenant, which is a promise by the nation that those who serve or

have served, and their families, will be treated fairly and suffer no disadvantage. It also allows for special consideration, especially and most importantly where a veteran has been injured or a family bereaved.

The covenant has achieved a great deal since its inception in 2011. It is now embedded in the NHS constitution, and all local authorities in Great Britain, as well as more than 2,500 other organisations and businesses, are now signed up to its principles, but there is always more we can do to support our veterans. I am encouraged by the fact that this Government have gone further and established the ministerial covenant and veterans board better to co-ordinate central Government's approach to our service personnel and to veterans and their families. Local delivery is supported by the covenant fund of £10 million a year in perpetuity, which funds projects across the UK.

That is all to be welcomed, but I have mentioned that there are difficult questions and there are challenges, and these cannot be ignored because, for some of our veterans, those disadvantages are foremost. I will focus on three issues, but chief among them is mental health.

In Devon it is estimated that almost one in six of our veterans has complex mental health needs, which is an issue that will no doubt grow in importance in the coming years. Over the next decade or so the veterans population will experience a dramatic shift from the second world war cohort of largely conscripted former service personnel to a younger cohort of professional servicemen and women who fought in very different conflicts and therefore face very different challenges. They fought in conflicts or took part in peacekeeping duties in theatres such as Northern Ireland, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Falkland Islands, the Balkan countries and many, many more.

Mental ill health, often presenting itself in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder, is in many cases an invisible condition. Not only does the state need to take greater notice, but society needs to change its attitude, too. That is something in which I take a particular interest, ranging across not just our former armed forces personnel but many others who are living with mental ill health.

I therefore welcome the Defence Secretary's recent pledge to increase funding for armed forces mental health services to £220 million over the next decade, and of course, as we heard recently, NHS budgets across the board are increasing, which is a start, but we must ensure that a significant chunk of that new money is targeted at those who need help with mental health conditions. Our growing understanding of the long-term impacts of active service and the changing nature of our veteran communities means we should look to go further, too.

To that end, I am encouraged by the establishment of the veterans strategy which will look to address the changing needs of our armed services personnel and improve mental health support. I very much look forward to its publication in November, and I am sure the Minister will talk more about that in his remarks.

We must also acknowledge the excellent work being undertaken by many charities, voluntary bodies and third sector organisations. It is invidious to just pull out a couple for mention as there are many and I wish to acknowledge all of them, but I mention in particular the charities Combat Stress and the Royal Foundation

of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, which works to support the “access pathway” into the NHS for veterans suffering from mental health problems. They are all doing very worthwhile work.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): As we are talking about the contribution of charities, I would like to bring to the hon. Gentleman’s attention the Lee Rigby Foundation, which is run by the parents of that murdered fusilier, who lived in my constituency. They have opened up a home for respite and retreat for injured soldiers and their families, and are also hoping to open a veterans lodge. They rely solely on fundraising.

Peter Heaton-Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that case; it is another fine example of a charity that is doing fantastic work in this regard.

The work done by such organisations, many of which we have not mentioned, is vital not least because research carried out by the Royal British Legion has found that social isolation and loneliness are now widely experienced among our veteran community, and that leads further to mental health problems. More attention must be given to the unique experiences of our armed forces community; their mobile lifestyle and self-reliant culture and a stigma about speaking out or seeking help can all lead to isolation, leaving veterans unable to seek support for what could be, or develop into, a serious mental health condition.

I recognise that much of the responsibility for our veterans lies with local authorities and in our local communities, and I am pleased that every local authority in Great Britain, including in my area North Devon District Council and Devon County Council, has now signed the armed forces covenant. But merely signing up to the covenant is not enough. Sadly, there remains wide variation in the implementation of the covenant’s pledges; it is to some extent a postcode lottery—that was the phrase used by one veteran who contacted me in the last few hours, having seen the social media publicity around this Adjournment debate. That veteran is correct.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Peter Heaton-Jones: I will of course give way to a fellow Devon MP.

Luke Pollard: I thank a fellow west country MP for giving way.

There are places like Plymouth and Portsmouth, and clearly north Devon as well, that are doing so much to embed the covenant in all aspects of the public services, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that this must not be a document that gathers dust on a local council’s or local business’s bookshelf; it needs to be lived and breathed and implemented every single day to make it real?

Peter Heaton-Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comment, and that is precisely the point I am seeking to come on to. Signing up to the covenant is not enough; there needs to be active participation by those who sign on the dotted line.

Another difficulty is that a lack of familiarity with the services available often prevents some veterans and their families from seeking the help and support that they need. That is why I am delighted that Devon

County Council has established a website—a one-stop shop—that serves as an online directory of services and support for veterans and their families. The Devon Forces Family website hosts dedicated information in a single place, making it quick and easy for all those connected with our armed forces to access the services and assistance they need. In particular, websites such as Devon Forces Family can help veterans and their families to find suitable housing, and therefore complement central Government policy.

The Government are helping forces families to get on the property ladder by, for example, making loans totalling £163 million to help more than 10,000 forces personnel to get on or stay on the property ladder. Veterans need to be afforded similar opportunities, and I hope that a way can be found to ensure that that can happen. Communication is key and co-operation across different levels of Government is essential. For those seeking social housing, local authorities must ensure that changes to the law, which have been designed to ensure that veterans with urgent housing needs are prioritised, are fairly and properly implemented in their area. We must be sure that all statutory bodies that are responsible for delivering on those changes are doing so, and that they are making sure that veterans receive the practical help that they need, targeted to them in a timely and efficient manner.

When we think about support for our armed forces veterans, there is a third aspect. I say at the outset that I take close notice of the Standing Orders as they relate to matters that are sub judice. It is perhaps the elephant in the room: the issue of historical prosecutions. The issue has been and is being considered elsewhere more widely, so I shall not comment on individual cases, except to say that I am taking an extremely close interest in one in my own constituency. It is a matter that is, understandably, causing concern to veterans in my constituency and elsewhere. Indeed, I have had a great deal of correspondence from veterans, and I met a number of them in my constituency surgery recently to discuss the issue. I understand their concerns.

Let me pose this question: do we really want our veterans to have to worry about hearing a knock on the door and being hauled before a court to be held to account to today’s standards for alleged offences that happened more than 20, 30 or even 40 years ago—incidents that happened when young servicemen, sometimes only teenagers themselves, were facing threats the likes of which most of us can only imagine? I add my voice to the growing support for a statute of limitations, which would see soldiers exempted from prosecutions after 10 years had passed. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty) for securing Monday’s Adjournment debate on the issue, which many of us stayed late to hear.

Let me be clear: that is not to say that these sorts of cases should be swept under the carpet and not dealt with at all. I recognise that closure is extremely important. I very much welcome the Northern Ireland Office consultation, which is currently seeking views on how better to address the legacy of Northern Ireland’s past. That consultation closes on 10 September; I urge veterans and interested parties to take part and have their voice heard.

For now, as we approach Armed Forces Day, I wish to achieve a number of things, and I am sure that the Government have the same ambition. Let us ensure that

[Peter Heaton-Jones]

we continue to do all we can to provide the help and support that our veterans need. As a Government, let us leave no stone unturned when it comes to ensuring that we are doing all we can. It is not just about money and resources; it is about using those resources more smartly by making information more widely available, making sure that we have joined-up thinking across all the statutory bodies and third sector organisations that work with veterans, and recognising in the first place the growing challenge that veterans face, particularly when it comes to their mental health.

Let us acknowledge and support the outstanding work that is being done, and let us do what my grandfather and I never had the chance to do: let us talk with pride about the service of our veterans, and in doing so recognise that we owe them all the help and support that they require, as well as a huge debt of gratitude, not only on Armed Forces day but on every day of the year—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I must interrupt the hon. Gentleman even though he is just on his peroration, because we have to move the 5 o'clock motion again.

5 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

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

Madam Deputy Speaker: I hope the hon. Gentleman can conclude his peroration in the way that he was doing.

Peter Heaton-Jones: I feel that I have perorated, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): May I begin with a declaration of interest as a colonel in the reserves?

As is customary on these occasions, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) on securing this important Adjournment debate. May I thank him also for an absolutely delightful and educational visit to Chivenor? It was a pleasure to go down there to see the Marines and the activities that are going on and also to understand what is happening as we rationalise the real estate of the armed forces. I am grateful for his interest in that matter. I am also thankful that he has drawn the House's attention to this important issue of mental health and to the support for veterans, too.

My hon. Friend mentioned his grandfather. He tells a tale of a 15-year-old who wanted to serve King and country and to lie on the sign-up sheets. That was repeated across the country. Massive tribute should be paid to the dedication, the loyalty, the commitment and the bravery of people stepping out into the unknown, unsure of what to do, but knowing also that it was the right thing to do. I pay huge tribute to his grandfather. I know that his action was repeated up and down the country.

My hon. Friend also mentioned Armed Forces Day. This debate is absolutely timely, as we celebrate, mark and reflect on the role that the armed forces play in our society. The bond between our armed forces and society is critical. We recruit from society. That is our gene pool, and it is where we want to attract people from, so that we have an armed force by consent of the nation. Therefore, that relationship that we have is absolutely pivotal if we want to keep the professionalism of our armed forces, which are revered and respected across the world.

I am pleased to say that the Secretary of State will be in Llandudno in north Wales, leading the focal point of Armed Forces Day celebrations, which will be repeated up and down the country as we pay our tributes. I see the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) is nodding. Last year, I went to the Armed Forces Day celebrations in his constituency, and they were fantastic.

My hon. Friend also mentioned that these celebrations mark the end of the second world war; they also mark the 100th anniversary of the RAF, so we have another opportunity this weekend to say thanks to those in uniform.

Interestingly, Northern Ireland celebrates its Armed Forces Day a week earlier. Last weekend, I was in Coleraine in Northern Ireland. Having served there myself, may I just say what a pleasure it was to be able to see the bands, the infanters and those in uniform marching down the high street of Coleraine with the absolute support of the public? It was absolutely gratifying to see that because when I served in Northern Ireland, we could not even move from one place to another unless we were on patrol in uniform. Again, it is an illustration of that important bond between society and our armed forces.

My hon. Friend raises this matter of support for veterans with a focus on mental health and other issues. I was pleased to give evidence this Tuesday at the Defence Committee's evidence session on armed forces veterans and mental health. This morning, I had the opportunity to speak at the Queen Elizabeth conference centre to the Forces in Mind Trust. This is an important body that helps to provide accurate data on exactly what is going on with our veterans and our armed forces. My hon. Friend mentioned that there are 2.5 million veterans. The profile of our veterans community is likely to change over the next 10 years. It will decrease by about 1 million because we will very sadly lose those who fought in the second world war.

As we are talking about the honesty and clarity of the data we need, I want to take the opportunity to emphasise up front that life in the armed forces is a rewarding and fantastic experience. The vast majority of personnel serve well, transition well and leave well. The nation has benefited from their service, and continues to benefit from their service once they have packed up their uniform and slid it across to the quartermaster that final time. We benefit because of the unique set of skills that people learn in the armed forces: leadership, teamwork, grit, tenacity, determination and a bit of attitude. Those are skillsets that any employer would want.

The majority of veterans transition back into society without a problem at all. Some 90% of people who have gone through our transition programmes are back in education or employment within six months of leaving

the armed forces. When we have debates, it is therefore important that we emphasise this point and try to remove the negative myths about our armed forces that still abound.

One of those myths is that people who serve somehow come out damaged. I am afraid that people have the perception that if someone is wearing a uniform or did wear the uniform, they will somehow be damaged. Lord Ashcroft's helpful report confirmed that that is absolutely not the case, as everyone who is close to the armed forces knows. If these myths perpetuate and we do not put the challenges in perspective, it can affect the reputation of the whole of the armed forces, it can affect employers who might think of recruiting somebody who was in the armed forces and it gives false perceptions of the experience. Veterans are no more likely to commit suicide, to have post-traumatic stress disorder or to have mental health issues than people in the general population.

That said, we are not complacent. We recognise that there are those who experience difficulties and need help, and we must be there to provide that help. We have brought forward the armed forces covenant to ensure that responsibility, which often goes way beyond the Ministry of Defence into other Government Departments. We want to ensure that those responsible are actually doing the things that they have to do in this regard.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The Minister is making an excellent contribution. When I visited Community Awareness Programme in my constituency, people told me about the large number of homeless veterans coming through their doors. The Minister is making a point about the liaison with local authorities and homelessness charities to provide specialist support to veterans who may have mental health needs that have not been addressed. That is very important, as such support can enable them to hold down a home, rebuild their families and enter civvy street again with dignity.

Mr Ellwood: I join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to the charity she mentioned. She makes a valid point, and I will come to the issue of homelessness in a second.

I stress that it is important to treat the issue of mental health with due concern, but we must also put it into perspective when we look at wider society. The issue has stayed in the shadows not just in the armed forces, but across society; there has been a stigma surrounding mental health, and it has become secondary to physical injuries. Yet, we need to recognise that a third of us are likely to be affected by mental health issues at some point in our lives.

If these early mental health issues are not challenged and are left unaddressed, they can effect a downwards spiral that reduces confidence, has an impact on employment, destroys relationships, feeds loneliness and, in extreme cases, leads to homelessness and suicide. That is why we are undertaking a comprehensive overhaul of how we deal with mental health. We launched a new mental health strategy last year that promotes positive mental health and wellbeing—we now speak of it as mental fitness—to ensure that it is on a par with physical fitness. We need to ensure that we prevent people from experiencing the effects of mental health issues to begin with, but also that if they are affected, there is good detection, so that we can recognise and analyse it. With detection comes treatment, and following treatment comes recovery.

We need to remove the stigma. We need to change the culture not just in society but in the armed forces, so that it is okay for someone to put their hand up and say that they are suffering from something, or for someone to point out that a friend, spouse and so on has an issue.

Those are the changes we are introducing, to ensure that every captain of a ship, every platoon commander and every individual is aware that it is okay to step forward and that help is available. I am really pleased that the Secretary of State is passionate about that. One of the first things he did in his role was to introduce a 24/7 helpline, working with Combat Stress, to ensure that there is a number to call, with professional help on the other end of the line. That now applies to those in the armed forces and veterans.

We have introduced a wave of measures for veterans. My hon. Friend covered them articulately, but I will touch on them briefly. First, the veterans gateway provides online access to a variety of veterans charities. I join him in paying a huge tribute to the incredible work that more than 400 military-facing charities do to provide those serving in our armed forces and those who have retired with the necessary support. However, if someone is homeless or unemployed, which charity do they turn to? It is important that there is a simple, single online gateway—there is also a telephone line—that gives advice and directs people to the necessary support.

My hon. Friend touched on the veterans board. It is imperative that we co-ordinate the work of Government Departments—whether it is the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Education or the Department for Work and Pensions—and the devolved Administrations, because they all have a responsibility. Local government is also critical, and that is where we need to do more work. As has been mentioned, there are fine authorities such as those in Portsmouth and Plymouth that are familiar with the armed forces because they have military assets in their neighbourhood. We need to ensure that every local authority in the country recognises its obligations to the covenant and has an armed forces champion—one senior director who does not necessarily do the work up front but directs all aspects of work to ensure that support is available for veterans. That is new, and we need to work on it.

My hon. Friend touched on the veterans strategy and invited me to say a bit more about it. It will be launched in November and, again, is an initiative of the Defence Secretary. It focuses on four themes: first, looking at perceptions and trying to remove the myths surrounding the challenges that we face; secondly, improving co-ordination between the support that is out there; thirdly, offering a cultural shift in our attitudes towards veterans; and finally, there will be studies on specific areas, including mental health and homelessness, which we know are bigger issues that we need to pay more attention to.

Let me be the first to recognise that while we have done significant work and have some incredible projects coming through, there is an awful lot more to do to sharpen the practical impact of the covenant and ensure that we do our best to provide support for our brave veterans. We are immensely proud of our armed forces, given what they do for the nation. Our commitment to them must go beyond equipping and training them well as they serve, to supporting them after they leave.

[Mr Ellwood]

In society, not just in defence, as we become more comfortable talking about and understanding mental health, everyone can play their part.

In conclusion, as we approach Armed Forces Day, I once again congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important Adjournment debate. Let us further encourage people to think differently about our ex-service personnel. Whether as former soldiers, sailors or air personnel, reservists or MPs representing our proud

and patriotic constituents, we all have a role in making this happen. We all know what our veterans have done in the past for our country, but we also know that they still have lots to give our nation in the future. We need to make sure that we put our considerable energies together to get that message out there.

Question put and agreed to.

5.14 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 28 June 2018

[MR PETER BONE *in the Chair*]

Transforming Rehabilitation

SELECT COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE

Select Committee statement

1.30 pm

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): We begin with the Select Committee statement. I remind Members to turn all electronic devices to silent. For the benefit of Mr Seely, Members may now remove their jackets.

Robert Neill will speak on the publication of the ninth report of the Justice Committee, “Transforming Rehabilitation”, for up to 10 minutes; during his speech, no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement, and call Robert Neill to respond to them in turn. Members can expect to be called only once. Interventions should be questions and should be brief.

1.31 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. In a different context, in weather like this many of us might have been told that we could remove our wigs, rather than our jackets. We do not have to do that today.

It is a pleasure and an honour to present this Justice Committee report on transforming rehabilitation. It is the result of an eight-month inquiry, during which we took significant amounts of written and oral evidence from providers and users from across the probation sector on the programme initiated by the then Government in 2014-15.

The programme was a major structural reform of the probation service, of the way probation activities are delivered, and of what probation activity comprises. It had high ambitions. Its key objectives were to reduce reoffending; to open up the market in probation services, particularly to bring in more voluntary sector providers; and to do so in a way that achieved efficiency and value for money for the taxpayer. I regret to say that the result of our investigation is that we conclude that it has failed on every single one of those measures.

Let me start by explaining why. First, reoffending rates remain stubbornly high. They are still historically high, and they do not bear comparison with those of our neighbours in western Europe and other equivalent advanced democracies. They have not been improved by the reforms. Indeed, in some areas, it is clear that sentencers’ confidence in non-custodial alternatives to imprisonment has declined, rather than improved. The objective was to have a robust system of alternatives to custody. I regret to say that we conclude that that has not been achieved.

Secondly, our evidence shows that the involvement of voluntary and third-sector organisations has declined, rather than increased. There are isolated instances of

good practice, but they are precisely that: isolated, patchy and frequently outweighed by the areas where the service is not delivering to the standard required.

Thirdly, the programme has not driven efficiency. Contracts were let to community rehabilitation companies on a seriously flawed financial basis. As a result, more public money, to the tune of several million pounds, has had to be pumped into those companies to keep the show on the road. That is not sustainable.

Let me set out the report’s findings in a little more detail. The contracts are important, because the purpose of the process was to split probation provision between the National Probation Service, which is still in the public sector, and the community rehabilitation companies, which are generally owned by a consortium of large outsourcing companies, the names of which we in the public sector are familiar with, with the involvement of some voluntary-sector groups—regrettably few, given what the intentions were.

The split was supposed to be based on risk: the higher-risk offenders would be supervised by the National Probation Service, and those of a lower risk would be supervised by the community rehabilitation companies. We conclude that that had two disadvantages. First, it disrupted the considerable networks that agencies had built up at a local level. Secondly, the community rehabilitation companies were often not geared up in time to take on the new responsibilities. We conclude that the introduction of the system was, frankly, rushed. There was no attempt to pilot it or do proper assessments before it was brought in. It is also clear from our evidence that risk is a crude and ineffective measure for dividing responsibilities, because an offender’s risk profile—the level of risk they pose to the public, their risk of reoffending and so on—changes over the course of their journey. That is not reflected in the way the division is currently cast.

The other very serious issue that concerns us about the contracts is this. It is clear from the evidence that the bids by the public-private sector consortiums were wildly optimistic in their financial assumptions, which were based on an assessment that the fixed cost of running the service would be about 20%. In reality, it is 60% to 70%. They could not have been further out. That meant that they were not financially sustainable, and the Government faced the prospect either of the contracts failing or of having to pump in more money. That is not a way to run a system efficiently or effectively.

We believe that there has to be more transparency about the contracts, and that the Ministry has to look again at its capacity to deal with such matters. It is clear that the robustness of the financial model was not challenged sufficiently at the beginning. That cannot be allowed to happen again.

We are not satisfied that the monitoring of the performance has achieved what was desired. A great deal of the system depends on payment by results, but we found that in practice, that does not work as an incentive to reduce reoffending. Again, it is a crude measure, not least because some of the factors that drive rehabilitation and the risk of reoffending are outside the control of the probation providers, so it is not a well set-up system of reward. We believe that the Ministry of Justice should review that mechanism, just as it must look at the split. There have been attempts to

[Robert Neill]

resolve the issue, but there are basic problems with data sharing, co-ordination and so on. They must be dealt with.

We must ensure that future contracts have specific targets and incentives to involve the voluntary sector properly, as was intended. The contract structure favours the big boys, because they have the resource to put in complicated framework bids, whereas smaller-scale operations frequently get squeezed out. That is the reverse of what was intended, and we believe that that needs to be changed.

Staffing morale was found to be at an all-time low in the National Probation Service and in CRCs. Staff have higher case loads than anticipated, and often feel that, because of the artificial nature of the split, they are dealing with cases for which they do not have adequate training. We think there is a need for the Ministry to publish a probation workforce strategy covering both the NPS and the CRCs.

We need to deal with the operation of the through-the-gate system—the attempt to provide people with support on release—which we find to be wholly inadequate. In the past, people got a £46 discharge grant and nothing else. Now, they appear to get a £46 discharge grant and a leaflet. The follow-up supervision is woefully inadequate. In some cases, it is a telephone call once every six weeks. That is no way to turn lives around properly. It does a disservice not only to the offender but to the public, because it increases the risk.

We also need to look at the use of custody in shorter sentences. The intention was to give sentencers confidence that they could punish by way of community orders of one kind or another. There is nothing wrong with having a punitive element in them, but they must also have rehabilitative elements. Unfortunately, because sentencers—magistrates and judges—do not have confidence that the requirements of the order will be properly monitored or delivered, their use has declined, rather than increased. Instead, more shorter custodial sentences are being imposed, despite the fact that all the evidence shows that short custodial sentences have the worst outcomes in terms of stopping reoffending, so it becomes a revolving door. We believe that there should be a presumption against short custodial sentences, but for that to happen, the Government must put in place a robust alternative.

There are a number of other issues, which I will happily touch on if asked to by hon. Members, but I hope that I have given an overview of a serious report, which was agreed by the Select Committee unanimously, cross-party, on the basis of compelling evidence. All the Ministers in the team are new to their post. They are having to pick up the pieces of something that was misjudged, but there is a chance to put it right. It is a question of properly reforming the system so that it works properly, which would be to our economic advantage, because the cost to our economy of reoffending is £15 billion or more, but it would also benefit society, because less reoffending means fewer victims, and that is in everyone's interests.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Given the comments of the Minister of State to the Justice Committee earlier this week, will my hon. Friend—that is what he is

in this context—confirm very strongly the Committee's recommendation at paragraph 46 on page 21 of the report? It states:

“The Ministry should undertake a public consultation on any further changes to ensure a wide range of views on contractual arrangements. This public consultation should consider the number of CRCs and the bodies eligible to bid for CRC contracts.”

Given the potential changes that that Minister announced on Tuesday, can the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), take back our strong cross-party view that that should be consulted on?

Robert Neill: I very much agree. I hope—indeed, I am sure—that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister will take that view back to her ministerial colleagues. It is very clear that the situation was not acceptable. Putting more and more sticking-plaster money into the system is not a sustainable way forward. I am glad to say that on an earlier occasion when the Minister of State gave evidence to us, he said, as hon. Members will recall, that removing or terminating contracts, if they were failing, was absolutely an option on the table, and so it should be, because the whole point of contracting out is that if there are failures, we can take the contract away, but for that to be done, there has to be a willingness both to do it and to put something workable in its place. The right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), whose work I very much appreciate, makes a most important point.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that although this report is undoubtedly critical of the system, the evidence that we received says that the system could be put right with work, and is not in fact broken?

Robert Neill: Yes, I think that is right; I do want to be constructive. Whether or not we would have started from here is an interesting question for debate, but we are here. Turning round systems such as this is a bit like turning round an ocean liner: it takes a long time. A U-turn is not practical, it seems to us, in these circumstances. That is why we say that an urgent review by the Ministry is necessary right across the piece to start identifying the areas of failure and start working on them immediately. I hope that our report helps to set out for the Ministry where that work needs to be done.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I thank the Select Committee for the report, and for fully endorsing the Scottish Government policy of a presumption against short sentences of 12 months or less. Recidivism rates are at a near-20-year low in Scotland, following the introduction of the prohibition. Does the Chair of the Committee expect to see a similar reduction in reoffending in England and Wales, or are there other, underlying issues that need to be addressed first?

Robert Neill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those comments. I am not sure how far the roll-out has gone so far, but we certainly believe that the move in Scotland is in the right direction, and that is evidenced by the situation in many other jurisdictions, where there has been the same effect. I would not want to be held to specific numbers, but I think that the direction of travel to which the hon. Gentleman refers would be

absolutely right. I do not think that there are basic, underlying causes that make the English more intrinsically criminal than the Scots, or more prone to reoffending than the Scots, the Germans, the Dutch or our other neighbours—it is tempting fate to say that to the hon. Gentleman, but with a middle name of MacGillivray, perhaps I can say it. I do not think that is the case, so I think we should pursue this proposal. The key bit, I think, is systemic failures, rather than underlying social causes.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I very much welcome the report, and particularly the recommendations in paragraphs 100, 102 and 106, which relate to the voluntary sector. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there needs to be much greater voluntary sector involvement in the rehabilitation of offenders, because those organisations are best placed to reach offenders and address issues relating to their offending, and that CRCs must do more to increase the employment and engagement of the voluntary sector in this sphere?

Robert Neill: The hon. Gentleman, whose work on the Select Committee is much appreciated, is absolutely right. There are examples of good work being done in the system. In the north-east in particular, there are some areas where the voluntary sector has worked well, taking a leading role within CRCs, but they are the exception to the rule. That is why we think that the new system must have specific targets for the voluntary sector, and means of getting it into the system. I know from my experience over the years that the voluntary sector is much more flexible. It is much more able to calibrate to the local social, economic, job-market and housing-market needs, which are all-important in rehabilitation, and is able to build up links at local level with the relevant agencies, in a way that so far has tended to be lacking in the very large and sometimes remote organisations. The hon. Gentleman is totally right.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I thank the Select Committee and its Chair for an excellent report, which I have read from cover to cover. I particularly agree with what the Chair said about the operation of the through-the-gate system. Was he as surprised as I was by the evidence given to his Committee by the Minister of State, who said that we had all got our expectations of through the gate wrong, and that it was simply meant to be a signposting service? Does he agree that the Ministry of Justice should properly assess, evaluate and embed good, systematic through-the-gate practice that supports offenders—before, at the point of, and after release from custody?

Robert Neill: That is absolutely right. My recollection is that that was not the way through the gate was sold at the time it was brought in. I think there is a little bit of

rewriting of history there, to be blunt. The truth is that for a long time we have been appallingly bad at follow-up supervision of people who are released. Through the gate actually extended it to those serving sentences of one year or less, which indicates that the Government thought that it was a good thing, but that has not been delivered in practice. We do need a wholesale review of it.

For example, if the CRC becomes involved with an offender only about 12 weeks before their release, that is wholly inadequate, in terms of setting that person up with the support that they need when they come out. We suggest that during that time, there be work to ensure that bank accounts are set up, and that people can register for universal credit, so that they get it on the day they leave custody, rather than coming out with their £46 and not necessarily having a roof over their head. The temptation for them then is to go straight to meet their mates at the pub or the café; they spend their £46; and then they are back into exactly the same sort of offending—often to drive drug, alcohol or other habits—that got them into prison in the first place. The leaflet in their pocket, which is supposed to do the signposting, is not much use to them in those circumstances.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I of course congratulate the Chair of the Justice Committee and all its members on the great job that they have done, as always, with their report. Current contracts with the private CRCs were due to expire in 2022. It was very interesting that the Prisons Minister recently said that terminating the contracts because of underperformance was “100% absolutely an option”. Can the Chair of the Committee shed any further light on whether the Government would have to pay any compensation to the CRCs if contracts were terminated early because of underperformance?

Robert Neill: One problem that we have, to which we refer in the report, is the lack of transparency around the contractual terms. One would expect, if there were a complete failure of performance, that there ought not to be significant payments, as with any contract, but we do refer to the tendency—it is not unique to the Ministry of Justice; it is across Government—for the excuse of commercial confidentiality to be used almost as a blanket bar to examining terms. That is why we recommend in the report that there be much more transparency around the letting or re-letting of contracts. We should certainly have more transparency about the matrix on which they are based, the financial model, the performance criteria that are built into them and the means of performance measuring of the CRCs themselves. We do not have adequate information on any of that, and I think the public are entitled to it.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): I thank the Chairman of the Justice Committee for his excellent statement. We now move to the main business.

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Russian Federation Activity

[*Relevant document: Eighth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Moscow's Gold: Russian Corruption in the UK, HC 932.*]

1.49 pm

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Russian Federation activity in the UK and globally.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. This is an important issue for me and I hope that others will see it as important, too. I am thankful to those who are taking part in this debate.

One of the most significant challenges that we face in this era is the Kremlin's political conflict against the west. It is one of our most complex problems. Western states arguably face a new kind of conflict, in which all the tools of the state, non-military as much as military, are combined in a dynamic, efficient and integrated way to achieve political effect. I have called this brief debate to seek updates from the Government on a series of issues. If the Minister will allow me, I will outline 10 ideas concisely, which I hope the Government will take on board. That does not mean that I am not supportive of Government policy at the moment. We have some down time after the immediacy of the Skripal poisoning to think more comprehensively about our relationship with the Russian Federation and its Government.

It is important to note that this is not about being anti-Russian, despite some of the nonsense that comes out of the Russian embassy and *Russia Today*. The friendliness of Russians to the English during the World cup, shows that the Kremlin's hostility to the UK is not shared more widely, regardless of whether we think President Putin is a popular leader or not. The World cup, however, is proving to be a PR godsend to his regime, because elsewhere it is business as usual for the Kremlin. The same day that England beat Panama 6-1, which everyone was very happy about, Russian jets were in operation in southern Syria, allegedly hitting civilian targets, the war in eastern Ukraine continued and dirty money continued to flow through and to London.

Critically, Russia's slide towards an authoritarian stance is part of a trend taking place around the globe—the rise of authoritarian states, which use open societies to protect and promote their interests, as well as to damage those open societies. China, Russia and Iran, as well as non-state actors such as Hezbollah, all use a complex mix of tactics.

One of the problems for western states is that we have not had a definition of this hybrid or full-spectrum war. A month ago I presented what I think may have been the first comprehensive, peer-reviewed definition in the western world. I argued that contemporary Russian conflict was sophisticated and integrated. At its heart is the old KGB active measures conflict, as it was called, a form of political warfare, around which has been wrapped the full spectrum of state power. I argued that there are at least 50 tools within this full spectrum of warfare, which can be divided up in six broad elements with command and control at its heart. This Matryoshka doll of conflict is one of the forms of conflict that we in the west will have to get used to, because it will be used. It is important to understand that Russia is probably the most sophisticated user of those tactics, but not the only one.

Russia's aims towards the west are perhaps more difficult to fathom. Contemporary Russian conflict appears to seek to divide and demoralise us—especially those states that border Russia—to damage the cohesion of NATO and the European Union, and potentially to break down the bonds that bind western alliances within the European Union.

Russia's allies are doing rather well at the moment. The Freedom party in Austria and the Northern League in Italy are both in power. For me, the most important point is that it is about reorienting Russian society away from a liberal model of development—albeit a corrupt, chaotic and unsuccessful one in the 1990s—to a much more authoritarian model. We are the enemy, not only because we represent an alternative to that but because the Kremlin security establishment needs an enemy to help it to exert control over the Russian people. We see that in the daily diet of propaganda on Russian state television.

I strongly support the Government's actions in recent months, but now that the immediacy of the Skripal case has passed, I would like to propose a series of measures, which I would be grateful if the Government would at least consider and maybe discuss with me at a time of their own convenience. First, I believe that we need to methodically expose what Russians and others are doing. In the 1970s and 1980s the United States established what it called an inter-agency active measures group, which investigated and publicised what was then known as active measures—the KGB form of subversion. As I said, that included tools such as disinformation, propaganda, assassination, support for terrorist groups, smears and espionage, running agents of influence, etc. I believe that we need to set up something similar, some kind of permanent structure to look at subversive operations against the west, the UK and our allies.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I am sure the hon. Gentleman will come on to this point. Does he agree that the Electoral Commission, in responding to measures aimed at subverting democratic processes in this country, is entirely unfit for purpose, that it is an analogue regulator in a digital age, and that, in fact, we should be integrating its functions into the National Crime Agency and giving it real forensic investigatory ability, to ensure that attempts to subvert our democracy are dealt with effectively and properly?

Mr Seely: I think the hon. Gentleman is more of an expert than I am on that. I absolutely think that the strength of our electoral systems and their vulnerability is one of the critical issues. I think it is number 8 on my list, so I will come to it shortly. I am grateful for his suggestion, which goes further than what I would propose.

To wind up the first point, occasional Government statements are good, as are some excellent Select Committee reports, but I believe we need something more permanent—not something that points fingers at the Russians but something that seeks to methodically understand the way subversive operations operate in the western world. We face a new kind of political conflict from hackers, trolls, assassins, politically connected business executives and market manipulators, spin doctors, paid-for protestors and criminals, who are often more usable and useful than conventional tools of conflict. On that point about market manipulators, given the Bloomberg investigation

earlier this week, which showed that hedge funds had been buying private polling data that effectively allowed them to front-run the Brexit vote, is it not time to initiate a parliamentary inquiry into the behaviour of those involved, especially considering statements made by some party political leaders at the time of the result, which appeared to concede defeat, despite possibly being told by their favoured pollsters that the Leave campaign would likely win? I choose my words carefully, but I think there is a *prima facie* case here, which is concerning.

Secondly, I believe we should introduce a list, as they have in the United States, of PR and other agents of Russian influence in the UK. Russians will have influence in this country that is clear and above board, but people who work for President Putin, one of the oligarchs, a proxy front or a third group linked to them need to be open about it and we need to have some kind of register. Perhaps that will be a voluntary thing for PR companies to do; it may be something for the Select Committees to do; but it may equally be something for Government to look at. We also need to ensure that the House of Lords has the same anti-sleaze standards as the House of Commons. It does not at the moment, and I think we can expect more scandals.

We do have a problem with Russian influence here, on both the hard right and the hard left. I have written about Seamus Milne's mirroring of Russian lines in 2014 and 2015, when he was working for *The Guardian*. I wrote about it in *The Sunday Times* in the spring. He is clearly one of a number of people with uncomfortably close links to the Kremlin around the Labour leadership. I believe that that does not serve democracy well.

Thirdly, we should introduce laws to ensure a health warning on broadcasters and other media that are paid-for propagandists for authoritarian states. A counter-propaganda Bill is going through Congress to do just that. Just as we have a public health warning on a packet of cigarettes, we can have some kind of public health warning on a TV channel that is a propagandistic outfit for an authoritarian state, which does not have an independent editorial line. If we shut down Russia Today or RT—or whatever it is calling itself this week—in our country, we can expect the Russians to shut down the BBC in their country and they would probably quite like an opportunity to do so. I am not suggesting that we do that. I am suggesting that TV stations that do not have an independent editorial line should be forced to advertise that fact in some way. The Countering Foreign Propaganda Bill, which is going through Congress at the moment, is potentially a model.

Fourthly, we should properly fund the BBC World Service radio and TV, and boost the Russian service more than is currently being done. We are in a battle with authoritarian states globally to promote free speech and open societies. I do not think this is a battle we should aim to lose; it is an important one to win. For me—this is a wider point—the Department for International Development should be paying all £400 million for that, as part of a fundamental rethink of what global Britain means and how we spend that 0.7%, because I do not believe that we get value for money for it at the moment.

Fifthly, we should change our visa regime to make it easier for ordinary Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians and people from that part of the world to come here, and more difficult for oligarchs, rather than the other way around. At the moment, our visa regime with too

many countries rewards kleptocrats at the expense of ordinary people. I congratulate the Government, potentially, on a recent oligarch visa decision.

Sixthly, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office needs to be more active in seeing Russian influence in the round. I am sure the Minister would say that it does, but more vocally, if that is the right word—being more vocal—on Nord Stream 2 would not go amiss. I am aware of recent statements by the German leadership about oil concerns for Ukraine, but we know how the Kremlin tends to get around such promises. We also need to ensure that the Kremlin's appalling war crimes in Syria, which are genuine, significant, serious and consistent, are recorded for history. We should work with others, if need be, to shout about it and use open-source information to highlight it.

We should also take much more interest in the hacking of the Democratic National Committee in 2016, in relation to the manipulation of the US presidential elections, which may be one of the most serious and significant cases of Kremlin and Russian espionage that we will ever witness in our lifetime. An important part of that process took place in London and probably involved Mr Julian Assange as the recipient and online publisher of the material stolen from the DNC. It is bizarre that we have not heard more from the Mueller inquiry in relation to London, because so many links seem to go through it.

I ask the Minister, and I choose my words carefully, what the current Ecuadorian Government are doing to encourage Mr Assange's exit and an end to this process. What representations have the Government had from Jennifer Robinson or other members of his Australian, UK-Australian and UK legal team? Two Australian consular officials recently visited Mr Assange, and I am curious as to why.

What passport does Mr Assange hold? I was told that it was an Ecuadorian diplomatic one, but it may not be. I ask that because the Soviets sprang George Blake from Wormwood Scrubs in 1966 and I am aware that under the previous Ecuadorian Government, the Ecuadorian secret service looked at a series of possibilities to get Mr Assange out, including a rooftop escape by helicopter, getting lost in the crowds in Harrods—I did not know it was that popular—being smuggled out in the ambassador's car and being made the Ecuadorian ambassador to the United Nations. I stress that there has been a change of Government in Ecuador, and I suspect those plans are no longer in the state they were before, but I would be grateful for the assurance that the Government are aware of the risks, especially in propaganda terms.

There are several potential suspects. A courier—a cut-out—was likely used to take the DNC-hacked material from the GRU, Russian military intelligence, and the Guccifer 2.0 account from Moscow to Mr Assange in London, possibly via a diplomatic pouch or a third country. Two weeks ago, James Clapper, a former director of US national intelligence, said that a suspect had been identified last year, so this is a live issue that very much relates to Russian activity in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, who is making a most interesting and powerful speech, but I want to ensure that we are not straying into anything that is sub judice.

Mr Seely: I do not believe we are—certainly not in this country.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): The hon. Gentleman has assured me, so that is fine.

Mr Seely: Thank you, Mr Bone. I am well aware of the point.

The suspects in this case range from the improbable to the possible. There are many Australians on the visitor logs to the embassy, which I have seen, but there is no evidence, and little reason, for those people to have been involved in handling stolen material. There have been allegations that UK politicians may have been conduits, but it should be clearly stated that again, there is no hard evidence. *The Guardian* has indicated several people, including a courier who has worked for Mr Assange in the past. A German gentleman who fits his description visited the embassy in late September, on the same day as the date stamp on the second DNC dump, which included the Podesta emails.

The FSB might have continued to use journalists. The first dump of DNC emails ended on 25 May, and in early June, an RT journalist, Nikolay Bogachikhin, visited the Embassy twice—a four-minute social visit, which is pretty taciturn even by Russian standards, and a slightly longer 22-minute visit on 8 June. If those were social visits, they were pretty brief. One cannot say much in four minutes, but there are probably other things one can do in that time.

Up to 80 people could be suspects, so I would be grateful if the Government could shed any light on who they believe is the culprit and whether they will encourage the US to name a suspect. I ask because the guilty parties were probably acting on behalf of the Kremlin to bring stolen material from the United States into Britain to influence the US presidential elections, which is incredibly serious.

To return to the main theme of my speech, my seventh point is that we should give Ofcom greater powers. The Latvian Government regularly complain about the content of Russian broadcasters from London who spew out propaganda in their country. Ofcom's investigations take up to a year, while RT and Sputnik churn out a regular diet of anti-western nonsense. I do not believe that we should ban RT or Sputnik, as I have told the Minister, but we need to strengthen Ofcom's powers, including fines and rights of reply, and ensure that it investigates broadcasters of knowingly fake or propagandistic news more quickly.

Eighthly, we should use our financial and legal powers to hurt people around the Kremlin regime. Transparency International has identified £4.4 billion-worth of properties in the UK that were bought with suspicious wealth, a fifth of which was Russian. I am curious to know whether any unexplained wealth orders have been used against people from eastern Europe.

Ninthly, we need to look at conventional deterrence as well, and I am sure we will do that at the coming NATO summit, which is causing a certain amount of consternation in political and military circles in Europe because of Mr Trump's, shall we say, erratic tweets. Russia's political and financial dealings with the west are part of a multi-faceted strategy that runs from information warfare to military dominance of its neighbours, including

dominance in tactical nuclear weapons and conventional missiles. It is part of a holistic strategy that includes military and non-military elements.

Finally, to repeat the point that the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) made, we need to understand the threat of bots and fake news to our democracy and our electoral system. We have seen how divisive disputed elections are, and one only has to look to Capitol Hill to see that Democrats want to talk about the 2016 US presidential election but Republicans definitely do not. In much the same way, Brexiteers refuse to discuss the referendum here. I voted for Brexit, and I have seen no serious and significant evidence that the referendum here was manipulated, but the time to talk about it is now—as soon as possible. Does the Minister realise how disastrous it would be for our country to have disputed elections and referendums in the same way as the United States? The German secret service recently accused the Russians of being heavily engaged online in the Catalan referendum and in other elections in the European Union. We have already discussed the United States. Does he realise the urgency of this issue? We should do this now, not in two years' time.

To sum up, we need to spend more money on hard power, but we also need to get the balance between hard and soft power right. We need to fundamentally re-examine what global Britain means and how we can maximise our influence in the world to defend the existing order and gently but resolutely deter countries that wish to undermine it, such as the Russian Federation under its current leadership and other states. Russian conflict strategies are an example of how political and other forms of war and conflict are changing. I am ready and willing to help and support the Government in that challenge, and I hope that they are willing to listen to me and other hon. Members on both sides of the House who wish to contribute to that debate.

2.9 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely), who made an excellent and powerful speech.

I remember my first flight to St Petersburg in May 2005 as clearly as if it were yesterday. I was on my way to take up my post as director of the British Council's operations there, and I felt a palpable sense of hope combined with a healthy dose of trepidation. I was looking forward to improving my Russian and getting settled into my new life in St Pete before formally starting the job in September, but I was also wondering what the coming years held in store for me, given the parlous state of the bilateral relationship.

Equally memorable, but for very different reasons, was my flight out of Russia in January 2008. The British Council had become a pawn in the stand-off that followed the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko by two state-sponsored hitmen on the streets of London, and we had been forced to close our St Petersburg office. In spite of the aggression and unpleasantness that came to dominate the relationship between the British Council and the Russian authorities, Russia will always hold a special place in my heart. It is a fascinating country of contradictions, extremes, suffering and joy, and I will never forget my time there. A wise person

once said: “You can leave Russia, but it will never leave you,” and I can certainly confirm the truth of that statement.

Being in the eye of that diplomatic storm for a couple of years enabled me to see at first hand the extent to which politics is underpinned by emotion, instinct, psychology and history. Russia is a proud nation, and its people are deeply attached to the concept of *uvazhaniye*, or respect. The national psyche is rooted in a sense that no Russian should ever be treated as second-rate, and anchored by the suspicion that Mother Russia is constantly being disrespected and destabilised by malevolent external forces.

The identity, instincts and mindset of the Russian people are shaped by geography. Inhabitants of a vast landmass, a country with borders so long that they are impossible to defend, the Russians have always suffered from encirclement anxiety. Their world view is shaped by the conviction that those who seek to exploit and undermine *nasha rodina*—the motherland—are constantly hovering on her doorstep, and their default position is therefore to strike first, to subjugate their neighbours and from this platform to build a sphere of influence.

From the empire-building of Peter the Great, to the establishment of the Soviet Union and its extension to the eastern bloc countries, the Russians’ constant and furious opposition to the expansion of NATO and Putin’s adventurism in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria, the narrative of encirclement provides the backdrop to every chapter of Russia’s turbulent history and actuality. That potent combination of pride and paranoia lies at the heart of every big political decision that has ever been made in Russia. It is the iron thread that connects the Tsars to Stalin and Putin.

Understanding the historical, cultural and geopolitical forces that shape Russian behaviour is by no means the same as excusing it. The Russian Government have literally been allowed to get away with murder for far too long. There are 10,000 dead in Ukraine, and 10 times that number in Syria. Alexander Litvinenko was brutally murdered by the Russian state, and at least a dozen more adversaries of Mr Putin died in suspicious circumstances on the streets of London. Anna Politkovskaya and Boris Nemtsov were assassinated in Moscow, a stone’s throw from the Kremlin. Now we have Sergei Skripal, his daughter and a British police officer struck down by a nerve agent on the streets of a quiet town in Wiltshire.

The Skripal attacks provoked a great deal of speculation about why the Kremlin would choose to carry out such a high-profile hit just a few short months before the World cup. In my view, the explanation is a simple one, encapsulated in two simple words: greed and self-preservation. The Putin regime has no guiding ideology. It exists to protect and further the financial interests of a narrow elite and to preserve its grip on power. It is a kleptocracy, turbocharged by hydrocarbons.

When oil is selling at more than \$100 a barrel, there are rich pickings, and the nexus of government officials and mafia bosses who run modern Russia are able to live and co-exist in relative peace and harmony. A few years ago, the price dropped to near \$40 a barrel, and although it has risen recently, it is still struggling to reach \$70. The pie has shrunk, which has constrained the Kremlin’s ability to incentivise and buy loyalty. What does a Russian President do if they are no longer able to offer the carrot to their henchmen and cronies?

They must deploy the stick. They must send the message, loud and clear, to all those who may know their secrets, and be thinking about betraying them, that retribution will be brutal, cruel and swift.

While assassination on the streets of Britain is Putin’s specific weapon of choice in securing the loyalty of the various clans and cabals that run Russia, he also knows that he must retain the broader support of the Russian people. He has done that through a series of cynical and ruthless foreign policy initiatives and military interventions. He knows that he needs to compensate for the abject failure of his Government to place the Russian economy on a sustainable growth footing, and he does so by seeking to unite his people against a range of common enemies. It is the oldest trick in the book. Thus the Russian threat to our security is not only through the Salisbury attack or the murder of Litvinenko. We see it in the invasion of Ukraine and the indiscriminate bombing of Syria. From 24 to 28 February, Russia conducted 20 bombing missions every day in eastern Ghouta. The month-long assault of eastern Ghouta alone is estimated to have killed more than 1,600 people, most of them thanks to Russian bombs. It has brought the death toll in Syria to more than half a million people. There are also 5 million refugees and more than 6 million displaced people.

As we have seen with the refugee crisis and the threat from Islamic State, the effects of Russian intervention have rippled directly on to our shores. President Putin deploys state-sponsored murder to retain the loyalty and discipline of his immediate entourage, and he uses military aggression to secure the broader support of the Russian people. Those strategies represent a grave threat to our national security and the security of our partners and allies. Both strategies must be tackled and defeated.

Russia’s geopolitical influence and substantial military clout stand in stark contrast to the small size and fragile state of its economy. In 2013, Russia’s economy was roughly the size of Italy’s and considerably smaller than Germany’s. Russia is grossly over-reliant on hydrocarbons, with approximately 70% of its GDP linked to the oil and gas industries. With the price of a barrel of oil plummeting, the value of the rouble tumbling, the demographic time bomb ticking, sanctions biting and poor economic policy decisions compounding those problems, the Russian economy is facing a perfect storm.

Against that backdrop, sanctions as a foreign policy tool are ultimately likely to have real effect. The sectoral sanctions imposed by the EU in the wake of the shooting down of flight MH17 by a Russian-made missile in July 2014 certainly led Russia to tread more carefully in its incursions into eastern Ukraine. There is some evidence to suggest that President Putin is not actively seeking to up the ante there.

The UK Government must now build on the success of those measures by committing to the following things. First, we must ensure that the Magnitsky amendment to the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 is implemented effectively. The Magnitsky amendment was a vital change to the legislation because it strikes at the hypocritical heart of the Putin regime, and makes clear to those with hidden assets in the west that Putin cannot protect them. For it to be effective, however, the sanctions list must be as accurate as possible, and the Government must therefore set out how members of

[Stephen Kinnock]

the public, Members of Parliament and peers can suggest additional names to be added to the sanctions list and the visa bans.

Secondly, we must continue to support asset freezes, visa bans and economic sanctions against Russia until such time as the terms of the Minsk ceasefire agreement, under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, have been fully implemented. Minsk is far from ideal, but it represents the only hope for stability and peace.

Thirdly, we must continue to support sanctions that are specifically connected to the annexation of Crimea for as long as Crimea is occupied.

Fourthly, we must commit to supporting the training and equipping of Ukrainian forces in the event of any attempt by Russia to ramp up hostilities in Ukraine, for example through a new land grab.

Fifthly, we must press for full implementation of the EU-Ukraine deep and comprehensive free trade agreement. Russian concerns about the DCFTA are simply not credible. Ukraine is a sovereign country and is therefore free to sign international agreements as it sees fit.

Sixthly, we must argue forcefully for the completion of the EU energy union. The EU's fragmented energy market and infrastructure cause several EU member states, including Germany, to be more reliant than is necessary on Russian oil and gas. That in turn gives Russia disproportionate influence in its dealings with the EU. By investing in interconnectors and integrating the energy trading market, the EU would fundamentally rebalance its relationship with Russia.

Seventhly, we must address the elephant in the room: the World cup. FIFA has handed Putin a propaganda coup, and in the wake of the Skripal poisoning, it was right for the Government to confirm that there would be no official UK representation at the World cup. We must hold firm to that.

My abiding memory of my time in Russia was of a burgeoning sense of polarisation between society and state. I saw and heard the values, instincts and hopes of growing numbers of young, well-educated and internationally minded Russians contrasting sharply with an increasingly reactionary and authoritarian governing elite.

Support for Putin was, and still is, relatively strong and widespread, but it is brittle. He derives his legitimacy from the fact that people are prepared to trade the rule of law, pluralism, transparency and freedom of speech for the security, stability and economic growth that he offers. However, when Russian holiday jets are being blown up in response to military adventurism, and when recession and inflation become the dominant features of the Russian economy, many more Russians will start to draw the conclusion that their President is failing to keep his side of the bargain.

Change in Russia, however, will not come any time soon, as evidenced by the recent election. President Putin can still count on the support of the majority of Russian voters, with the only notable exception being the growing middle class in Moscow and St Petersburg. Clearly, the assiduously developed propaganda that is pumped out by the state media machine plays a major role in maintaining Putin's approval ratings, but my

time in Russia also taught me that the Russian people are still traumatised by what they perceive to have been the chaos and humiliation of the Yeltsin years. The stability that Putin brought following that turbulent period continues to underpin his popularity today.

It is essential that we respect the will of the Russian people. Vladimir Putin has been their leader of choice for more than 15 years, and he will continue as President until 2022. Let us therefore engage with Russia as it is, not how we would like it to be. Let us demonstrate through our words and deeds that we truly understand the history, culture, interests and foreign policy objectives of this vast nation with huge potential.

Let us also be absolutely clear, strong and resolute in the face of Russian aggression. That clarity, strength and resolution must start right here in this House. The Kremlin will constantly and consistently attempt to divide us, and we must not allow them to do so. That is why it is vital that my party makes it crystal clear that we support both the words and actions of the Government, the EU and our NATO allies in dealings with Russia.

This is not the moment for whataboutery. This is the time for a robust defence of our values, and clear recognition that if a bully is given an inch, he will take a mile. Let us therefore move forward together, across parties and communities, to forge an unbreakable and unanimous position on this issue of profound importance to our national interest. Let us send this message to Mr Putin, loud and clear: "The British people will no longer tolerate the brazen and reckless actions of your regime, and we will no longer tolerate the way in which you and your cronies use London as a laundromat for your ill-gotten gains."

We will act rapidly and robustly to deliver the changes that are long overdue. We have the utmost respect for the history and culture of Russia, and we will never forget the tremendous sacrifices that the Russian people made when they stood shoulder to shoulder with us to defeat the Nazis. We also accept that Russia will possibly—perhaps probably—never be a liberal democracy, and we have absolutely no desire to impose our world view. Nobody in their right mind is talking about regime change, but we need to see radical behaviour change.

At the outset of my speech I mentioned the Russian word *uvazhaniye*, meaning respect, and underlined the importance that Russia rightly attaches to being respected by others. Respect, however, is a two-way street, and it has to be earned. If the current occupants of the Kremlin wish to earn our respect, they must radically change their mindset and behaviour, and they must do so now.

2.24 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship for the second time, Mr Bone, and to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) on securing today's important debate, although my speech will be more about not letting our guard down than going through several points; I have no list.

As colleagues may be aware, this is an issue on which I have spoken several times since my election last year. Nevertheless, I continue to be concerned about Russia's threatening activity. I grew up in the '50s and '60s, and

I remember the practice sirens to warn us of impending nuclear attack. That was the most chilling time of anyone's life, and none of us wants to go back there.

Russia's activity undoubtedly affects our country, and we continue to see Russian military forces probing our boundaries. That aspect of Russian behaviour poses a real danger to the UK and our overstretched armed forces. Russian submarine activity has increased tenfold in the north Atlantic in recent years, and last year we had to respond to 33 of those incursions. That is a concern, but the threat from Russia goes far beyond that. It is growing and adapting and the threat has now taken on a more malign form. In this country, we know that all too well, given the devastating and seemingly effortless use of the nerve agent Novichok on the streets of Salisbury earlier this year. Although that was indeed a reckless action, we would be naive to think that that is all that Russia has planned, given our level of exposure to a potentially catastrophic cyber-attack, similar to NotPetya in Ukraine. That follows warnings from GCHQ and the FBI that Russia is currently targeting millions of computers in preparation for a major cyber-attack.

Moreover, some of the evidence that we took in the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee shows frightening use of bots and misinformation, which to my mind is aimed at driving wedges into the western alliance. We are not just dealing with traditional threats—those that come from land, sea and air. Hostile activity from Russia directed towards this country is becoming more common. It is also adapting and taking more aspersive forms: cyber-attacks. As I have said before, those are not the actions of a rational state with a stable leadership that wants to play by the rules. We should remember that when we consider our next steps.

When dealing with Russia we must try to look at the balance of power in Europe from a Russian point of view. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) recently pointed out, there has been a sort of Russian national paranoia for most of its existence—especially since 1917—and with some reason. The hon. Member for Aberavon touched on that. Consider the losses and upheaval suffered through two world wars, with 20 million dead in world war two alone.

The Russian people are kept in a state of constant existential threat by their leadership. I do not believe that we in the west deliberately create that threat. We must maintain a strong defence, but that is read in Russia as a threat because that is how the modern Russian leadership clings to power and, incidentally, to unbelievable wealth. By portraying the west as an evil coalition determined to bring Russia to its knees, Putin's administration manages the outlook of the Russian people. They feel surrounded, and therefore do what history teaches us that states in that condition do: they cling to a perceived powerful leader. It is no accident that Putin is often shown in a heroic light—sometimes bare chested, riding a horse and carrying a gun. I am very glad that our leaders do not do the same, although I am glad that our Government are showing strength and sending the strongest possible message of condemnation to the Russian leadership. Their continued provocations must be met with an appropriate and sustained response.

That response, however, must come from the international community as a whole, as we are seeing similar activity from Russia around the world. To pick just a couple of examples, we have seen the use of hard power in Crimea and Syria recently, as we saw it in Georgia and Chechnya

in the past. Although I have no doubt that we will see that again in the future, it is right that, in the face of such hostility and overwhelming historical precedent, we deploy a range of tools from the full breadth of our national security apparatus, to prevent it from happening again. It is appropriate that we continue to push for NATO to strengthen its deterrence and defence capabilities, while ensuring that dialogue with Russia continues, as part of the alliance's commitment to avoiding misunderstanding and miscalculation.

We must also remember that the big scary bear to the east is not really that powerful at all, as was touched on earlier. Its economy is two thirds of ours; it is smaller than Italy's. Its economy is also flatlining, showing no signs of growth. It does not stand a chance of competing seriously with us, Europe or America. So what does it do? It seeks to destabilise those around it, while concentrating the minds of its population on an existential threat. In the past, that meant massively investing in tanks, guns and aeroplanes, which they and we did, but they have discovered a new and much cheaper weapon of destabilisation, which could be equally devastating: the aforementioned cyber-attack. We have had several cyber-incursions of late. So far, we have dealt with them, but they are constant.

I have described Russia as not being so scary, but because it spends a significant amount of its GDP on defence, it has a very competent military—nothing close to the combined might of the west, but potentially devastating—and now the bear is wounded and cornered and therefore weak. Like any wild animal in such circumstances, it becomes incredibly dangerous. That is why we must maintain our alliances. We must maintain and enhance our defence spending. We need to secure our tier 1 military status as a matter of priority and maintain our position in NATO by increasing our own budget to 3% of GDP. We must also push for more NATO members to meet and exceed the target of investing 2% of their GDP on defence.

Overall, we must speak beyond the Russian leadership, who have a vested interest in maintaining the dangerous instability. We must speak directly to the Russian people, reassure them that we mean no harm and bring them into the fold of harmonious human co-existence. They might then rid themselves of their dangerous leadership and thus, as a peaceful neighbour, become a prosperous part of the European family.

We have no disagreement with the people of Russia, who have been responsible, as the Prime Minister said, for so many great achievements throughout their history—including the ongoing World Cup, which England will surely win. We must celebrate that which unites us, such as football, while being wary of that which divides us.

2.31 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) for securing time for this wide-ranging and topical debate. He also reminded us that the debate is not anti-Russian, and identified the need for a permanent structure against subversive measures. I agree with that and will return to it later.

I was pleased to listen to the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) with his direct knowledge of and insight into the Russian psyche and economy,

[Martyn Day]

and to the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling), who raised cyber-attacks and incursions into the North sea, which are both issues that I will return to. I look forward to hearing the Front-Bench spokespeople in due course.

There can be almost nobody who disputes that the democratically elected Russian Government have some very draconian anti-gay and lesbian laws, have been implicated in the murders of a number of journalists and dissenters, and have form in ignoring international law and undermining state sovereignty; or that there are serious questions about Russian money laundering and dodgy cyber-activities promoting fake news and possibly influencing various electoral contests around the globe. The list seems almost endless, and I could go on, but I think everybody gets the idea.

Where should I begin? It is worth putting on the record my belief that the UK needs to maintain its co-operation with our allies in combating the various threats. That is best practice, irrespective of whether we believe the threats to be real or imagined. I have very real concerns that the UK is isolating itself through Brexit at a time when working with our European friends is more important than ever before. My colleagues and I in the Scottish National party believe the UK should pledge to remain a member of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council post-Brexit. It is important that the UK maintains relations on the UN Security Council and keeps a united position with international allies on the matter of Russia. The SNP has been at the front of cross-party calls for the Government to adopt a Bill similar to the Magnitsky Act in the US, which would allow the foreign sanctions that the hon. Member for Aberavon spoke about earlier. I thoroughly agree with that.

We have heard much about the physical threats from Russia, including the Salisbury attack, Syria, the annexation of Crimea, and activity in the Georgian territories and Ukraine. I will not delve into those issues more deeply; I think we are all on the same page.

We know Russian bombers regularly probe NATO airspace with incursions as far south as Spain and as far north as Scotland. Russian jets pressing on the Scottish coast resulted in RAF jets being scrambled in January this year, and in September and May last year, and submarines pressed on the Scottish coast as recently as November and July last year. In October 2017, the then Defence Secretary told the Select Committee on Defence that there had been an "extraordinary increase" in Russian submarine activity in the north Atlantic. Scotland has a pivotal place in the High North and it is a critical point for national security.

In January 2018, the Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Nick Carter, warned that the UK is trailing Russia in terms of defence spending and capability. There have been no maritime patrol aircraft since the last Nimrod left service in 2012. I call on the UK Government to restate their commitment to purchasing all nine of the promised Poseidon P-8 aircraft and to put defence resources in place as soon as possible.

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of Russian activity relates to cyber-security infrastructure and threats to domestic politics and elections. No amount of conventional border controls or armed forces can protect against this new hybrid war. We need new specialists to counter the growing threat, and ensuring that the UK has the

cyber-security experts it needs must be a priority for the Government. What steps are being taken to close the gap between the supply of and demand for those experts? What appraisal has been made of the effectiveness of programmes such as CyberFirst in encouraging students to pursue careers in cyber-security, because we are really going to need them?

The Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport inquiry into fake news has raised key concerns about Russia's interference in UK politics and society, including evidence highlighting that between 6% and 7% of URL-sharing activity in the US election came from Russian sources. University of Edinburgh research has revealed that more than 400 Russian-run Twitter accounts that were active during the 2016 US presidential election were also actively posting about Brexit during the EU referendum. In March, the *Sunday Herald* reported that Scotland's First Minister is facing online cyber-attacks from Kremlin trolls. She has been aggressively targeted on social media. The SNP has recommended that the Cabinet Office, the Electoral Commission, local government, GCHQ and the new National Cyber Security Centre establish permanent machinery for monitoring cyber-activity in respect to public figures, elections and referendums.

Accusations abound regarding potential Russian interference with the Brexit vote. I do not know how that stacks up. We will all have seen the press reports that appeared first in *The Observer* about Arron Banks, the millionaire businessman who bankrolled the Brexit leave campaign, having had multiple meetings with Russian embassy officials in the run-up to the referendum. The SNP wants to ensure that this specific case of interference in the Brexit referendum is investigated fully and impartially, and that the implications of Russian political interference, if proven, are treated with extreme severity, given that the outcome goes against the wishes of the Scottish electorate. I look forward to learning the results of the Electoral Commission's investigation into the source of Mr Banks's £8.4 million referendum donations and loans. We call on the Vote Leave campaign to engage with the authorities transparently and fully in the investigations.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that Putin and his regime have been portrayed as villains of the piece, not without some justification. He is not an imaginary bogeyman; he is very real. He is also serving what is likely to be his last term as President of the Russian Federation, barring similar shenanigans to what has previously happened. We must therefore begin preparations for the post-Putin era, but who are his potential successors? I do not know, but that may present a potential opening, with the possibility of not repeating past mistakes that have led us to the current situation of seriously strained relations. As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight has suggested, an easier visa regime may help assist that position. However, I fear that a diplomatic service consumed by Brexit will not be able to find the resources to do that. Nevertheless, we have to be able to defend ourselves against fake news and bot armies, as well as conventional attacks and terror-related incidents, irrespective of whether they be of Russian or any other origin.

2.38 pm

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I thank the hon. Member for Isle of Wight

(Mr Seely) for his detailed introduction; he is clearly very close to the issue, particularly so in his previous life, before he came to this place. He shows a huge and continuing interest in security matters. I take issue, however, with his mention of a member of the Labour leader's staff, who is not able to respond. That did not need to be aired here. It is possible to do that in other places, but it is not for this place.

Russian foreign policy making has become increasingly the preserve of Putin. Russian foreign policy is based on realist assumptions—a vision of zero-sum competition between nations, using largely hard power to establish spheres of interest based on geography. Policies are aimed at restoring national pride and Russia's place at the top table in world affairs. Defence spending has gone up, and Putin's popularity is reported to be a near-record high.

That reflects the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who spoke of understanding the culture of the Russian people, how nationalistic they are and how deeply entrenched their national heritage is. That is one reason why Putin has been able to get away with his actions following the sanctions placed on Russia.

[Ms KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

My hon. Friend spent time in Russia with the British Council, which does a huge amount of great work, not only in Russia but across the whole world, as I have said before. Its presence in other countries is one of the United Kingdom's best forms of access to them, which further increases our sphere of influence. We should always look, at the first opportunity, to get the British Council into those areas.

Most of our senior policy makers were not quite awake to Mr Putin's returning to the presidency in 2014, since when there has been a stand-off with the west over the Russian intervention in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and a dramatic fall in oil prices. Since then, hard-line nationalist assumptions have increasingly entered official Russian foreign policy, although they have no means of taking it over completely. Economic difficulties have increased, and Russian nationalism and assertive foreign policies have been increasingly used to bolster the legitimacy of the Government at home, who continue to use external threats for that purpose.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight mentioned Sergei and Yulia Skripal and the chemical agent Novichok being used on British soil, which is hugely serious. That has quite rightly been hugely condemned worldwide, with the rest of the world showing its distaste for the action and its significant support for the UK; several countries expelled Russian diplomats to show that that was not acceptable, and nor should it be in the arena we are in. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the chemical weapons watchdog, was last night strengthened by a vote in which the UK was supported by its allies to overcome Russian opposition. After not getting the result they wanted, the Russians are now considering leaving OPCW. Dealing with that will be a serious issue.

Furthermore, the Skripals' house was purchased by the British Government to the tune of £350,000. Obviously, a nerve agent being used in that house makes it difficult for anybody else to live there. The city of Salisbury has suffered hugely because of that incident, and we are

fortunate that the effect on the Skripals and the police officer who was directly affected was not far more devastating. We need to compound that point and make it clearly.

Russia is subject to a sanctions regime imposed in a co-ordinated move by the EU and the US, and other western allies such as Canada, in reaction to the destabilisation of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, which continues and needs to be looked at closely. We need to look at what else we can do to encourage Russia back into negotiations on that and back into politics. The sanctions are targeted against individuals and entities. As other hon. Members have already said, we need to understand who we should target—whether they be ordinary Russians coming into the United Kingdom or those oligarchs associated with Mr Putin and the Russian establishment.

The hugely important issue of money laundering has been raised, and it should be a serious part of trying to resolve the issues. There has been mounting pressure to introduce Magnitsky legislation in the UK. The original Magnitsky Act powers in the USA provided for the officials allegedly involved in Sergei Magnitsky's death to be sanctioned, although it was later broadened into a general power for the US to impose sanctions against human rights abusers. We need to seriously consider implementing such important legislation.

I see that the occupant of the Chair has changed; it is a privilege to serve under you, Ms Buck. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon said that we need to further examine assassinations by Russian intelligence and security services across the UK but also in Russia. He clearly made the point that there must be a political solution to the issue but that that should not come at the expense of remaining robust in fighting against Russian intervention and aggression where it is not needed.

The hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) raised the World cup. I certainly hope that we win it—we are having such a good run. He also raised cyber issues and the weakness of the Russian economy. A significant amount of work has been done on the cyber issue, including reports produced by the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the Intelligence and Security Committee and several others. We should look at those and consider how to follow up on them.

Hon. Members also mentioned alleged war crimes in Syria—particularly the chemical weapons attacks in Douma and in the north-west of Damascus in Ghouta. The OPCW fact-finding mission arrived in Syria on 14 April 2018 to establish whether chemical weapons, and what type, were used in Douma, although it has not attempted to ascribe responsibility for their use. We need to seriously look at such issues and find out those facts. There have been a huge amount of human rights abuses by the Syrians and by ISIL terrorists, and we need to seriously consider how to deal with and resolve such horrendousness in the future.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) made several points on cyber-attacks. More importantly, he raised the protecting of the rights of the LGBTQ community. Although the Russians are making a show of doing so during the World cup, which in itself is a step forward, it needs to be embedded in Russia so that the right sort of support is provided.

[Mr Khalid Mahmood]

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight raised a couple of issues that the Minister should address, particularly regarding a cross-agency approach. Perhaps we could use the “Five Eyes” network. Such systems are crucial. Rather than looking only at networks internal to the UK, it is far more important to co-ordinate our networks across the globe. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the sorts of sectors we should cover, including the key sector of investment banking. Not all the money brought in is through money laundering—a lot is done through the financial sector. We must address that and look at what sort of people are involved. Allegations have been made regarding raffle tickets being bought for tennis matches, and the Minister should also address the serious issue of party donations.

I wholly agree with the hon. Member for Isle of Wight that, along with the British Council, the BBC World Service plays an integral role in the work that needs to be done. It puts across the British heritage angle. That is a huge tool in developing relationships. Many people rely on the BBC World Service to listen to what they believe to be factual information. We need to invest money in that. I am not sure I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the Department for International Development should do that, but I am sure that the Minister can find money elsewhere for that investment.

I support the hon. Gentleman’s comments on the visa regime, but although we are talking about Russia, there are other countries we should support in that respect. On the policy of cutting professionals who come to the United Kingdom, I am glad that the Home Secretary has managed to reverse the position for doctors who come here. I hope that will also be the case for other professionals, such as the nurses and medical staff from eastern Europe and elsewhere across the globe.

Will the Minister tell us whether the Prime Minister is considering downgrading our status as a tier 1 defence nation? That serious issue has been developing in the newspapers, but I do not believe anyone in Parliament has asked or answered that question. If I may, I want to use the Minister as a conduit and get information from the Government about whether the Prime Minister is considering downgrading us to a second-tier defence nation. I do not believe that would be in the interest of the nation. There have been significant cuts, but in order to fund the national health service we should not cut our defence. Defence has been hugely strategic for the United Kingdom for a very long time and I hope it stays that way. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s response.

2.52 pm

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Seely) for securing this debate and for his comprehensive and thought-provoking paper on contemporary Russian conflict, which the Foreign Office is digesting. I was particularly struck by his assessment in the report and his speech that Russia uses at least 50 tools of state power, grouped into seven elements with “command and control” at its heart.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. I particularly appreciated the thoughtful speech by the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock),

who has direct personal experience of working in Russia. His speech deserves to be widely read. Likewise, my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) gave us all a very cogent and comprehensive overview of the threats that we face from Russia.

It should be clear to us all that Russia has become more authoritarian, more nationalist and more aggressive in recent years. It increasingly defines itself in opposition to the west and as a victim of western aggression. It attempts to portray itself as a responsible global power, but its actions tell a different story. In reality, for some time it has been using a range of methods to undermine the international norms and laws on which our security and prosperity depend, and to destabilise our advanced democracies, open societies and free economies. Those methods range from conventional military intervention—as we have seen in Syria and its illegal actions in Georgia and Ukraine—to acts of non-military aggression in the form of disinformation and cyber-attacks, as we saw in Estonia in 2007. They range from stirring up trouble—as we saw in the attempted coup in Montenegro—to clamping down on dissent by locking up people such as Oleg Sentsov. All those methods are designed to destabilise by sowing chaos, fear, uncertainty, mistrust, and division.

Russia is expanding the range of its malign activities, as we found to our cost in Salisbury—I will say more about that in a moment—and it continues to strengthen its military capabilities. It engages in provocative military activity near NATO borders, for example by stepping up submarine traffic in the north Atlantic, which we heard about earlier. Russia is also undermining the treaties and norms of global arms control. Just this week we have observed the shameful spectacle of Russia trying to block the efforts of the Conference of States Parties to protect the chemical weapons convention. However, yesterday 82 countries voted in support of the proposal tabled by the UK, and the Conference of States Parties agreed that the OPCW would immediately start work to help to identify those responsible for chemical attacks in Syria. It will be able to attribute the use of chemical weapons to someone.

The attack in Salisbury was an especially egregious example within the pattern of increasing Russian aggression. It clearly showed the risks that Russia is prepared to take in its provocation of the west. We are quite clear that Russia was responsible for this outrageous act. It is also pretty clear that the Kremlin wholly underestimated the strength of global feeling. Following the expulsion of 153 diplomats from 28 countries and NATO, it can be under no illusion now about our collective resolve. In addition to the reckless use of chemical weapons in Salisbury, the Kremlin also seeks to sow discord here in the UK; it wants to disrupt our systems and undermine our institutions. We know that there have been attacks on the UK media, telecommunication companies and energy providers, along with attempts to interfere in our democratic processes. We have seen no evidence of successful interference, but we can see the threat and we must remain vigilant.

I assure the House that the Government are responding to those threats with strength and determination. I assure the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) and everyone that we are working across Government to protect our democracy. We have invested nearly £2 billion in the UK’s national cyber security strategy and in the establishment of the National Cyber

Security Centre, which will fight cyber-attacks by states and criminal organisations. We are collaborating with international partners, industry and civil society to tackle the threat of disinformation and propaganda.

Independent regulators such as the Electoral Commission and Ofcom are also playing their part. The commission is investigating irregularities reported during the EU referendum campaign and Ofcom is conducting 11 investigations into breaches of the broadcasting code. Disinformation is not new, but it has been turbo-charged by the power of social media. In whatever form it takes—old-fashioned propaganda, fake news, or downright lies—it is designed to manipulate, confuse and divide. It is also designed to undermine trust in our institutions and our way of life.

Freedom of speech and a free, open and accessible media are hugely important components of that way of life. I understand why my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight requested a counter-propaganda Bill, but will he consider the possible unforeseen consequences that might ensue? I am sure he would agree that we would not wish to impose a legal strait jacket on the personal freedoms that we hold so dear. Nor should we assume that problems will be solved simply by passing legislation. We will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to bear down on disinformation, while at the same time continuing to champion freedom of speech. We will also look to enhance online safety. The Government will publish a White Paper on that in the coming months. Potential areas for legislation include a code of practice, transparency reporting and online advertising.

We are committed to tackling illicit finances in the UK, whatever their origin. I welcome the Foreign Affairs Committee's report on the subject, to which the Government will respond in due course. We are determined that this country should not be a safe haven for dirty money and money launderers and we will ensure that the full weight of law enforcement is brought to bear on corrupt elites who look to use, move or hide the proceeds of crime.

Since the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 was introduced, more than £2.2 billion has been seized. The first unexplained wealth order has already been issued—there was a question about that—and we are cracking down on the use of shell companies to launder money through UK real estate transactions. Through the national economic crime centre, embedded within the National Crime Agency, the Serious Fraud Office will work with law enforcement partners to ensure that big business and wealthy foreign elites cannot use their wealth to obstruct justice.

Parliament recently passed the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018—indeed, I was in charge of the Bill's passage—which gives us the powers to sanction individuals and entities for a wide range of purposes including money laundering, as the name suggests, and take action against those suspected of gross human rights abuses such as those committed against Sergei Magnitsky. Indeed, the whole House joined as one in welcoming the embodiment of the Magnitsky clause in that Act. While not directly related to the fight against illicit finance, the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill will also strengthen our ability to counter hostile state activity by bringing in new powers to stop, question, search and detain individuals at the UK border.

In addition to domestic action, the UK continues to work closely with our international partners and allies to tackle Russian aggression across the globe. We have been at the forefront of the strong and determined international response to the Salisbury attack mentioned earlier. Sanctions remain a key part of the ongoing response, and we will continue to work proactively on that with our US, EU and G7 partners. Indeed, we are working with those partners to fight back against state-sponsored aggression in cyber-space. Together, for the first time on such a scale, we attributed the NotPetya cyber-attack to the Russian military. In April, in another first, we issued a joint statement with the US Government publicly exposing an extensive and sustained campaign of Russian intrusion into the internet infrastructure of both our countries.

At the G7 summit earlier this month, leaders agreed on a rapid response mechanism to share intelligence, co-ordinate action and develop new strategies to tackle malign state activity, and at today's European Council the Prime Minister will be discussing how EU countries can work together to meet the range of threats we face. We hope that leaders will agree to work alongside NATO to build stronger defences against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats, take collective action to tackle Russian cyber-threats and extend EU efforts to counter Russian disinformation and interference in Europe.

At next month's NATO summit in Brussels, we will seek unity and consensus on Russia and emphasise the need to work towards a strong defence and deterrence policy. At the western Balkans summit in London next month, the Government will stand firm in our resolve, alongside partners, to help the region counter Russian disinformation and cyber-threats. Indeed, the UK is investing more than £100 million over five years in countering disinformation that targets our national interests at home and overseas.

Countering disinformation also underpins our efforts in tackling the challenges faced by Russia's neighbours—Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary attended the Ukraine reform conference yesterday, and our £30 million in support of Ukraine's reform agenda includes strategic communications support and building the Ukrainian armed forces' resilience.

We feel obliged to take our current approach because Russia appears increasingly prepared to test our collective response. However, as has been said on both sides of the House, I stress that we are not looking for confrontation. We have no quarrel with the Russian people. We are encouraged that they have warmly welcomed World cup fans from around the world, and we want to work with Russia on issues that matter to all of us, as we did on World cup preparations.

However, we will not compromise with states who seek to degrade the structures and treaties that keep us all safe. Russia needs to choose a different path. It must act as the responsible international partner it claims to be, and indeed, the partner it should be, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Until that happens—I hope that it will—we will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with our many partners and allies, resolute, determined and united against those who seek to divide us.

3.5 pm

Mr Seely: Thank you, Ms Buck, as well as Mr Bone, for your chairmanship of the debate. I thank the Front-Bench Members as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) and the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for taking part.

On the hon. Gentleman's point, it is incredibly important to understand Russia's complex, somewhat love-hate relationship with the west and, in debates such as this, to seek more to understand than to condemn. That is

why I wrote the definition and have suggested measures that the Government can take. It is important to do that rather than simply see the world in binary terms.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Russian Federation activity in the UK and globally.

3.6 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 28 June 2018

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Energy Policy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): In its written ministerial statement of 11 January 2018, *Official Report*, column 9WS, the Government set out their commitment to put in place all the necessary measures to ensure that the UK can operate as an independent and responsible nuclear state upon the UK's withdrawal from Euratom. As made clear in a further written ministerial statement of 26 March 2018, the UK will take legal responsibility for its own nuclear safeguards regime when Euratom safeguards arrangements no longer apply.

The necessary measures include the negotiation of new bilateral safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). I am pleased to announce that on 7 June 2018 the UK and the IAEA signed these new agreements—a voluntary offer agreement and additional protocol—and we intend to bring these to Parliament for ratification this autumn. The new agreements will replace the current trilateral agreements between the UK, the IAEA and Euratom.

The conclusion of these agreements marks the successful achievement of a major Euratom exit milestone and an important step towards ensuring business continuity for the civil nuclear sector once Euratom arrangements cease to apply to the UK.

On 26 June 2018, the Nuclear Safeguards Bill, which provides the necessary powers to establish a domestic nuclear safeguards regime, received Royal Assent. The passage of this Bill marks another important Euratom exit milestone and paves the way for the secondary legislation, on which the Government will be publicly consulting over the summer, to be put in place before the end of March 2019.

The Government have also progressed their discussions on nuclear co-operation agreements (NCAs) with priority countries to ensure continuity for the civil nuclear sector. On 4 May 2018 the UK signed a bilateral NCA with the United States of America, and remains on track to have bilateral agreements with all priority countries in place when Euratom arrangements cease to apply to the UK.

In parallel with the above, the Government are negotiating with the EU on the UK's separation from, and future relationship with, Euratom. The UK and EU have now reached agreement on all Euratom related articles of the draft withdrawal agreement. The relevant text has therefore been finalised.

There is more detail on these matters in the second quarterly update which has today been provided to Parliament by way of a report. The paper will be placed in the Libraries of the House. As Royal Assent of the Nuclear Safeguards Bill was received on 26 June, the content and timing of these reporting updates to Parliament will be determined by the relevant provisions of that legislation.

[HCWS809]

Industrial Strategy

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark): As part of the industrial strategy, the Government committed to making the most of the UK's strengths, so we can develop the technologies that will transform existing industries and create better, higher-paying jobs in every part of the United Kingdom. The nuclear sector is an undoubted strength of our economy and one of the most advanced in the world, from research, fuel production, generation through to decommissioning, waste management, transport and our world-class regulatory system—it is an industry which offers huge opportunity for the future.

Sector deals, where industries are invited to come forward with plans for their future, embody the ethos of our collaborative approach. They show how industry and the Government, working together, can boost the productivity and earning power of specific sectors. We have already struck ambitious deals with the artificial intelligence, life sciences, automotive and creative industries sectors and we look forward to building on this in the months ahead.

The Government have worked closely with the sector champion Lord Hutton and industry leads from the Nuclear Industry Council to develop a number of proposals by 2030, which include:

- 30% cost reduction in the cost of new build projects

- Savings of 20% in the cost of decommissioning compared with current estimates

- Women to make up 40% of the nuclear sector by 2030

- Win up to £2 billion domestic and international contracts

The deal contains mutual commitments to drive greater productivity, innovation and exports by: adopting innovative advanced manufacturing and construction techniques in new nuclear projects: supporting advanced nuclear technologies including small modular reactors (SMRs) and a range of research and development activities; a joint review of the decommissioning pipeline to achieve greater value for the taxpayer and to boost exports; a supply chain competitiveness programme to support UK business to build capabilities to win work domestically and internationally; and a range of proposals to support a future workforce including a new apprenticeship standard and a commitment to a more diverse workforce, including a target of women making up 40% of the nuclear sector by 2030.

The UK has consistently been a world leader in nuclear technology and has been at the forefront of many new developments in the industry. This deal will continue that tradition through the establishment of a new framework to support the development and deployment of SMRs and the innovative technologies that support them. This support is designed to challenge the industry to bring forward technically and commercially viable propositions that would lead to the deployment of new reactors that would be investable and cost competitive in the energy system. This builds on the package announced in December 2017 of up to £44 million for research and development funding (up to £4 million in phase 1 and, subject to Government approval, up to £40 million for phase 2) for “advanced” modular reactors. I am pleased to announce the following companies have made credible propositions from a range of UK and international concepts and will receive grant funding to undertake detailed studies:

Advanced Reactor Concepts LLC;
 DBD Ltd;
 LeadCold;
 Moltex Energy Ltd;
 Tokamak Energy Ltd;
 U-Battery Developments Ltd;
 Ultra Safe Nuclear Corporation;
 Westinghouse Electric Company UK Ltd.

The Government remain committed to fusion alongside fission and announced £86 million, in December 2017, to create a new national fusion technology platform at Culham in Oxfordshire. The Government are also working in partnership with the Welsh Government to develop a £40 million thermal hydraulics facility in north Wales as part of the nuclear innovation programme.

I have deposited a copy of the “Nuclear Sector Deal” in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS804]

CABINET OFFICE

Piloting Alternative Electoral Canvassing Models: Evaluation Report

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I am pleased to publish the Government’s evaluation of the pilots conducted in 2017 in England, Scotland and Wales testing alternative approaches to the current annual canvass for the electoral register. These pilots were conducted under section 9 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. The Electoral Commission has today published its own evaluation of the pilot findings.

The Government brought forward legislation to conduct these pilots to test alternative approaches to the canvass as the current process is expensive, administratively complex to run and confusing for citizens to navigate. The alternative approaches were initially proposed by the electoral community, with four models being refined and taken forward for piloting. These models were a household notification letter (HNL) model, a telephone canvassing model, an email model and a model that introduced a data discernment step at the start of the process. We tested these four models over 24 different local authorities in 2017, following a smaller sample of piloting the previous year. I would like to thank all the local authorities and their staff who participated.

The pilots and evaluation show that there are viable ways of improving the canvass to achieve a reduction in cost and administrative burden without compromising the volume and quality of data that is currently collected through this process. In particular, the pilots have shown that we can use data to help better target resources to those properties with a change in household composition. The pilots have also shown the ability to deploy more modern communication methods to engage citizens in the annual canvass. It is time the canvass process is brought into the 21st century. Doing so will build on other reforms to modernise electoral registration, such as the introduction of online registration, which have helped ensure the electoral register used for the 2017 general election was the largest ever.

The Government now intend to consult in the coming months on reforms to the annual canvass based on the pilot findings. We believe a hybrid model, incorporating the most successful elements of each of the models piloted, will be the most beneficial in achieving the aims of reform. We intend to publish a policy statement later this year setting out the plans and asking for feedback from all interested parties.

The pilots show the benefits of engaging closely with stakeholders, who are best placed to shape a system that works for everyone. We are indebted to the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Scottish Assessors Association for their collaboration to date and look forward to this continuing throughout the development and implementation of these reforms.

Our intention is for reforms to be introduced across Great Britain. As elements of electoral registration are devolved in Scotland and Wales, reforms will need to be introduced jointly. We are therefore working closely with the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales. The publication of the evidence from the pilots is an important milestone that will help underpin this collaboration.

I am placing a copy of the evaluation report in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS805]

TREASURY

United Kingdom Debt Management Office Business Plan

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The United Kingdom Debt Management Office (DMO) has today published its business plan for the financial year 2018-19. Copies have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and are available on the DMO’s website, www.dmo.gov.uk.

[HCWS810]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Building Safety Update

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Today, my Department has published the “Building Safety Programme: monthly data release” for June. This updates data on the identification, testing and remediation programme for aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding systems on high-rise buildings. I wanted to update the House on the further steps my Department is taking to ensure this work is completed as effectively and swiftly as possible.

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Government have been working closely with local authorities and fire and rescue services to identify and make safe high-rise buildings with unsafe cladding as a matter of urgency.

Through the Government-funded testing programme at Building Research Establishment (BRE), which has been made available at no cost to all local authorities, housing associations, and public and private sector building owners, 314 buildings have been identified as having unsafe cladding. Of these, 159 are social housing, 14 are public buildings, and 141 are private residential buildings.

For high-rise buildings in the private sector, my predecessor wrote to local authorities last summer asking them to identify all privately owned buildings with potentially unsafe cladding. We have provided local authorities with £1.3 million to assist in this process. As part of this work, local authorities have been collecting information on ACM buildings in their areas which have not been tested at BRE. This effort from local authorities has resulted in them assessing over 6,000 high-rise private sector buildings. They have now identified an additional 156 private sector high-rise residential buildings with unsafe cladding. Adding these to the 141 already identified by BRE testing brings the total to 297 private sector high-rise residential buildings identified as having ACM cladding that is unlikely to meet current building regulations guidance.

We are confident that, through this testing and the hard work of local authorities, we have identified all social housing with unsafe ACM cladding systems in England. However, beyond the 297 confirmed private sector buildings, the cladding status of approximately 170 private sector residential buildings remains outstanding. For all but a handful of these buildings, local authorities have commenced enforcement action to obtain the necessary information from owners who are responsible for ensuring safety. Based on current evidence, and the identification rate to date, we expect 3% to 5% of the remaining buildings to have similar ACM cladding systems to those which have failed large-scale system tests. Address details for these buildings have been passed to local fire and rescue services, which are prioritising visits to those buildings to confirm appropriate fire safety measures are in place.

In the private sector, local authorities are checking actions being taken to remediate buildings and have told us about plans for 72 of the private sector buildings identified to date. Of these, 21 have started remediation, and four of these have been completed. Remediation work has also started on 70% of the social sector buildings, and the Government will fully fund the removal and replacement of unsafe ACM cladding systems on residential social housing buildings 18 metres and above owned by social landlords, with costs estimated at £400 million.

In the light of this updated information, I am taking the following steps:

A new ministerially-chaired taskforce is being established to actively oversee the remediation of private sector buildings with ACM cladding systems. The taskforce will be charged with ensuring that remediation plans are put in place swiftly across all private sector buildings with ACM cladding systems, addressing any barriers or identifying any additional support required to achieve this. Membership of this taskforce will include the Local Government Association (LGA), the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), London councils, local authorities who have experienced the largest degree of impact and industry representatives.

The LGA and NFCC are convening a joint expert inspection team to help local authorities on the ground. This team will support local authorities in ensuring and, where necessary,

enforcing remediation of private sector high-rise residential buildings with unsafe ACM cladding systems. To support the work of the inspection team, I am making up to £1 million available to support local authorities on further enforcement steps and the Department is also developing further statutory guidance for local authorities to enhance their use of existing Housing Act powers in relation to fire safety hazards associated with cladding on high-rise residential buildings.

Following my recent roundtable with industry representatives, I have responded to their suggestions by inviting them to develop industry-led solutions to deliver remediation, exploring all options to protect leaseholders from additional costs. At a further meeting in July, I will expect industry to present their proposals with a view to agreeing next steps. I rule out no options if industry and individual building owners of developers do not come forward with their own solutions. In the meantime, I will continue to explore other routes for protecting leaseholders. These may include: supporting local authorities to take more targeted action to identify and remediate affected buildings and recovering costs from those responsible for ensuring the safety of buildings; and supporting leaseholder enfranchisement.

My Department is writing to all relevant private sector building owners to remind them of their responsibility to make their buildings safe. This includes: confirming to the relevant local authority whether they have ACM cladding systems if they have not yet done so; implementing any necessary interim safety measures and permanently remediating their buildings, reminding them that local authorities have powers to enforce these improvements if building owners do not take action; and setting out my expectation that they should explore all options to protect leaseholders from incurring the costs associated with replacing unsafe cladding.

Building owners are responsible for ensuring the safety of their buildings and their residents. Government and local authorities will monitor and hold them to account for this where they have unsafe ACM cladding systems. The Government continue to drive forward these steps as a priority, with the aim that residents are safe in their homes and that they feel safe.

The link to the data is:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-safety-programme-monthly-data-release-june-2018>. I will place the documents in the Library of the House.

[HCWS811]

PRIME MINISTER

ISC Detainee Reports

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): The Government agreed with the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) in December 2013 that it would inquire into the themes and issues identified in Sir Peter Gibson's detainee inquiry report, take further evidence and produce a report. The ISC has now concluded its work and its report on detainee mistreatment and rendition issues has today been laid in Parliament. It is in two parts: the first on the period 2001 to 2010; the second on current issues.

The Government welcome the publication of the ISC's reports. It is important to begin by noting the context in which the Government, including the security and intelligence agencies and armed forces, was working in the immediate aftermath of 11 September 2001 and the deployments of armed forces personnel to Iraq and

Afghanistan. The UK responded, alongside its international partners, to the tragic events of 9/11 with the aim of doing everything possible to prevent further loss of innocent life, both here and overseas. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the priority again was preventing loss of life.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that UK personnel were working within a new and challenging operating environment for which, in some cases, they were not prepared. It took too long to recognise that guidance and training for staff was inadequate, and too long to understand fully and take appropriate action on the risks arising from our engagement with international partners on detainee issues. The agencies responded to what they thought were isolated allegations and incidents of mistreatment, but the ISC concludes that they should have realised the extent to which others were using unacceptable practices as part of a systematic programme. The agencies acknowledge that they did not fully understand this quickly enough and they regret not doing so.

UK personnel are bound by applicable principles of domestic and international law. The Government do not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (CIDT) for any purpose. The ISC has noted, in the context of its historical report, a number of cases where intelligence and armed forces personnel are alleged to have threatened individuals in foreign detention. Such alleged behaviour is clearly unacceptable and the ISC's current issues report recognises that improvements have been made to operational processes, fostering a greater awareness of risks and establishing enhanced oversight in relation to detainee issues.

Since 2010, UK intelligence and armed forces personnel have operated under the published consolidated guidance. It provides direction for UK personnel and governs their interaction with detainees held by others overseas and the handling of intelligence derived from them. As the ISC acknowledges, very few countries in the world have attempted to set out their approach to these matters, and let themselves be held accountable in this manner, and it is to the security and intelligence agencies' and Ministry of Defence's credit that they have embedded these procedures and ensure that their personnel follow them carefully when dealing with detainees held by others. It is coupled with a world-leading independent oversight regime, underpinned by the Justice and Security Act 2013 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. This has given enhanced powers to the Intelligence and Security Committee to oversee the activities of the security and intelligence agencies, alongside the statutory role of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, Sir Adrian Fulford.

Working closely with international partners is an essential part of keeping this country and its people safe. In doing so UK personnel seek assurances from those countries on their treatment of individuals and make clear the UK's position on torture and CIDT. Detainee-related work remains important and at times difficult, but intelligence and armed forces personnel are now much better placed to meet that challenge. The lessons from what happened in the aftermath of the appalling terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 are to be found in improved operational policy and practice, better guidance and training, and an enhanced oversight and legal framework. We should be proud of the work

done by our intelligence and service personnel, often in the most difficult circumstances, but it is only right that they should be held to the highest possible standards in protecting our national security.

The Government will give further consideration to the ISC's conclusions and recommendations, noting that it has expressed a number of concerns about the consolidated guidance, but has said that these should be read in the spirit of continuous improvement. Formal oversight responsibility for the consolidated guidance rests with the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, following my direction to him under section 230 of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, with effect from 1 September 2017. I am therefore inviting Sir Adrian to make proposals to the Government about how the guidance could be improved, taking account of the ISC's views and those of civil society.

The Government will consider the reports in full and respond formally in due course.

[HCWS808]

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 21 June 2018 in Luxembourg. The Deputy Permanent Representative to the European Union, Katrina Williams, represented the UK.

Three legislative proposals achieved general approach at the Council. These were the proposed revision of regulations on co-ordination of social security systems (883/04 and 987/09); the directive on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union 16018/17; and the directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council directive 2010/18/E.

The Council also discussed the European semester. As part of this agenda item, the Council approved draft Council recommendations on the national reform programmes 2018 of each member state; endorsed the opinions of the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC) on the 2018 country-specific recommendations (CSRs) and the implementation of the 2017 CSRs; and adopted a proposal on guidelines for the employment policies of the member states.

There were a number of progress reports and information items during the Council. These included an update on proposals for an equal treatment directive, the proposed European Labour Authority, and an overview of the Commission's plans for the future European social fund plus (ESF+) and European globalisation adjustment fund (EGAF).

The Council closed with updates on the status of other legislative files, broader developments in the field of employment and social policy, and an overview of the priorities of the incoming Austrian presidency.

[HCWS806]

Jobseeker's (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): I am today laying a proposed draft remedial order to amend the Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013.

The proposed draft remedial order ensures the right to a fair hearing for a small group of jobseekers who had a live appeal against a sanction decision made under the Jobseeker's Allowance (Employment, Skills and Enterprise Schemes) Regulations 2011 ("the ESE regulations") when the 2013 Act came into force. It enables the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to change this sanction decision and refund the amount withheld, without those affected individuals having to continue with their appeal.

In 2013, the courts ruled that the Jobseeker's Allowance (Employment, Skills and Enterprise Schemes) Regulations 2011 that underpinned a range of programmes of support to help people into work did not describe the individual schemes in enough detail, and that our referral letters did not say enough about the activities required. The 2013 Act reinstated the original policy intent of these regulations. This ensured that jobseekers who had failed to take all reasonable steps to increase their chances of finding work between 2011 and 2013 did not unfairly obtain advantage over claimants who complied with the benefit conditionality requirements.

The Court of Appeal has since ruled that the 2013 Act is effective.

The 2013 Act did not prevent people from appealing if they felt they had a good reason for not participating in one of the employment schemes, but it meant their appeal would be unsuccessful if it related to their compliance with the 2011 regulations or the referral notification letters they received. The Court of Appeal has ruled that the Act has prevented claimants who had an appeal for failing to comply with the 2011 regulations still in the tribunal system on 26 March 2013 from having a fair hearing. For this small, specific group, the Court found that the Act is incompatible with article 6 of the European convention on human rights. The proposed draft remedial order addresses the Court of Appeal's decision but does not affect the continuing validity of the 2013 Act.

I am using the non-urgent remedial order process to allow time for parliamentary scrutiny. The next 60 sitting days are a consultation period for Members of both Houses to send me any views. The order will also be scrutinised by the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and it will write a report. I will consider all representations I receive on the proposed draft order, and the Committee's report. Once I have done so, I will revert to both Houses with a draft of the remedial order for consideration for a further 60 days.

[HCWS807]

Petitions

Thursday 28 June 2018

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

The petition of residents of South West Surrey,

Declares that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidelines and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and

further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002163]

The petition of residents of Cheadle constituency,

Declares that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidelines and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mary Robinson.]

[P002165]

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 28 June 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
INTERNATIONAL TRADE	1015	WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—continued	
Business Investment Overseas	1020	Intimate Sexual Images: Distribution	1033
Exports in Global Markets	1015	Maternity Discrimination	1031
Future Trade Agreements: Parliamentary Scrutiny	1023	Menopause Training and Information in the Workplace.....	1031
Topical Questions	1024	Period Poverty.....	1028
Trade and Road and Rail Infrastructure	1022	Topical Questions	1034
Trade Deals with Developing Countries.....	1018	Universal Credit: Women in Abusive Relationships	1029
US Tariffs: EU Countermeasures.....	1022	Women in the Science, Technology and Engineering Industries	1027
WOMEN AND EQUALITIES	1027		
FTSE 100 Finance Chief Roles	1032		

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 28 June 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY	35WS	PRIME MINISTER	40WS
Energy Policy	35WS	ISC Detainee Reports	40WS
Industrial Strategy	36WS	TREASURY	38WS
CABINET OFFICE	37WS	United Kingdom Debt Management Office Business Plan	38WS
Piloting Alternative Electoral Canvassing Models: Evaluation Report	37WS	WORK AND PENSIONS	42WS
HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	38WS	Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council	42WS
Building Safety Update	38WS	Jobseeker's (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013	43WS

PETITIONS

Thursday 28 June 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>
PRESENTED PETITIONS	3P
Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation	3P

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Thursday 5 July 2018**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Thursday 28 June 2018

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1015] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for International Trade
Minister for Women and Equalities

Nuclear Sector Deal [Col. 1039]

Answer to urgent question—(Mr Gyimah)

Business of the House [Col. 1048]

Statement—(Andrea Leadsom)

Adult Social Care: Long-term Funding [Col. 1065]

Select Committee Statement—(Mr Betts)

Leaving the EU: Parliamentary Scrutiny [Col. 1073]

Select Committee Statement—(Hilary Benn)

Privilege [Col. 1082]

Motion—(Andrea Leadsom)—agreed to

Backbench Business

Improving Air Quality [Col. 1085]

Motion—(Neil Parish)—agreed to

Advisory Committee: Business Appointments [Col. 1130]

Motion—(Sir Bernard Jenkin)—agreed to

Petition [Col. 1144]

Armed Forces Veterans [Col. 1145]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Transforming Rehabilitation [Col. 437WH]

Russian Federation Activity [Col. 443WH]

General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 35WS]

Petitions [Col. 3P]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
