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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 5 July 2018

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Road Investment Strategy

1. **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): Which road schemes he plans to allocate funding to as part of the second Road Investment Strategy. [906262]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): The Department is considering evidence about the strategic road network gathered by Highways England and stakeholders over the past two years, alongside responses to the consultation that took place over the winter. The Department will be announcing the decisions about which new enhancements will be included in the second road investment strategy in 2019.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. On the A417 missing link scheme Swindon to Gloucester, can he confirm that it is the Government's intention that a preferred route will be announced in the first quarter of next year, followed by the development consent order process, followed hopefully by RIS2 funding, and with an intention to commence in the early 2020s to build this much-needed road where there has been a fatality recently?

Jesse Norman: This road is both dangerous and highly congested. Highways England has been carrying out a consultation on improving the missing link near the Air Balloon pub, as my hon. Friend will know, and I have recently met him and colleagues. Once the responses have been analysed there will be further consultation ahead of the preferred route announcement. We certainly hope there will be a PRA early in 2019.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am sure the Minister is aware that road links between Sheffield and Manchester are as bad as between any two major cities in Europe, and I invite him to join me to demonstrate that fact, as one of his predecessors did. Will he confirm that even if construction work will not start in the next funding period, at least design work will start on the promised scheme to link the two cities together?

Jesse Norman: I can make no such confirmation; the hon. Gentleman knows the structure of RIS2, and we will make the announcement in 2019, but I will be delighted to have further conversations with him about the scheme in question.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I listened very carefully to what the Minister said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown). The A417 missing link road scheme is important to all Members of Parliament for, and the county of, Gloucestershire, so I welcome what the Minister said and urge him to follow through on his commitments to my hon. Friend, and remind him that we will all be watching and waiting to make sure he follows through on the commitments he has made at the Dispatch Box.

Jesse Norman: I am always grateful for reminders of the importance of parliamentary accountability, and I take that cue. My right hon. Friend will recall that this is not an inexpensive scheme. We are hoping to bring it to birth, and have given it a very strong commitment and continue to do so, and we are looking for a PRA early in 2019, as I have said.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): Haydock island in my constituency is where junction 23 of the M6 meets the East Lancs road and very busy local roads. The system has been reconfigured but still is not working, and my constituents, residents and local businesses are suffering. Will the Minister meet me and local representatives to ensure we can improve it by including it in the next scheme in 2019?

Jesse Norman: If that scheme has been placed into the RIS2 consultation it will presently be a matter for consultation with officials. I am happy to have a meeting with the hon. Gentleman, but not in any sense that puts the formal process of consultation and deliberation at risk.

Transport Infrastructure

2. **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What steps he is taking to invest in transport infrastructure. [906263]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): The Government are investing record sums to deliver the transport infrastructure that Britain needs. The Department for Transport's annual capital spending will more than double over this decade, from £8 billion in 2009-10 to £17 billion in 2019-20. This money will deliver our ambitious five-year investment plan for the rail and strategic road networks, take forward delivery of High Speed 2, and help improve air quality.

Dr Whitford: First, I am going to use my position to wish all staff in the NHS a very happy 70th birthday.

The Secretary of State makes the classic mistake of thinking infrastructure is just steel and concrete, but the airspace routes above the UK were designed in the '60s and simply cannot cope with the 2.3 million planes that use them every year. The NATS air traffic centre at Prestwick has invested in the technology to allow more

direct planning and shorter routes and to save fuel and reduce noise. When will the Government actually reform the airspace?

Chris Grayling: I echo the hon. Lady's comments about the NHS: I am looking forward this afternoon to travelling out with my local ambulance service to see the work of NHS staff, which, as she rightly says, is first rate.

As you will be aware, Mr Speaker, we have already launched the process of airspace reform in this country. We are currently depending on technology that is decades old; it is not now fit for purpose and we need to move to a world that is controlled by state-of-the-art digital technology. That will create the capacity we need, and a rolling programme is planned for the coming years of modernisation of our airspace across the UK.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): A second entrance at Putney station would not only ease congestion, but would finally give connectivity with East Putney tube station. This project is supported financially by Wandsworth Council. Can the Secretary of State, following our recent meeting, look carefully at what support his Department can give this scheme so it can finally get the go-ahead?

Chris Grayling: I regard that scheme as a quick win that could make a real difference to passengers. I have asked my officials to consider it carefully, and I will carry on talking about it with my right hon. Friend. I am sympathetic towards the potential benefits of creating a better interchange between the underground and the mainline railway in her constituency.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Transport Secretary mentioned technology. Since the Government have devolved funding for speed cameras to local police forces, cameras have been switched off due to policing cuts. Will the Government reconsider that? There have been some severe accidents on the A449 Stafford Road in my constituency, including a fatality, and we need new speed cameras on that route.

Chris Grayling: I will absolutely take a look at that issue. We try to devolve responsibility for such things, but I will look carefully at that. We should always be mindful of stretches of road where there have been fatalities.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I am extremely grateful to the Secretary of State for his interest in the Shipley eastern bypass and for coming to visit my constituency to see the route at first hand. Will he update me, the House and my constituents on the progress being made towards finally introducing a bypass?

Chris Grayling: My officials are currently considering what it would take to move the project forwards, and I have had discussions with the combined authority. The potential route sits alongside a growth area in West Yorkshire, so I am personally taking an interest in the scheme, which is now subject to careful assessment.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): In recent weeks we have seen endless delays, cancellations across the north and a report from the Select Committee on

Transport that confirmed a bias against northern regions in rail investment decisions, and we now hear reports that the trans-Pennine electrification will be scrapped altogether. Will the Secretary of State now respond properly to the One North campaign and commit to giving Transport for the North the full powers and funding it needs to deliver the necessary changes?

Chris Grayling: I am afraid that this is a total misnomer. First, the part of the country that will receive the highest Government spending per head on transport over the next five years is the north-west. Spending is higher per head of population across the north than it is in the south. Secondly, as I have already announced, we will start the £3 billion trans-Pennine upgrade next spring, which will substantially rebuild the railway line between Manchester, Leeds and York and deliver much better services to passengers. It is long overdue.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Network Rail plays a key role in delivering rail infrastructure investment projects both north and south of the border. Given that many of the Secretary of State's colleagues think that Network Rail is too big, that he often gives it a kicking himself and that the Scottish Government have responsibility for the strategic delivery of rail north of the border, will he at last take steps to devolve Network Rail fully to the Scottish Government?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman keeps arguing for that, but it was not recommended by the commission that examined what powers the Scottish Government should have. My advice to the Scottish Government is to try to use the powers they have well rather than ask for more.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I urge my right hon. Friend to look favourably upon applications for investment in smaller schemes on de-trunked roads, such as the A350 and the C13 in my constituency. They are vital arteries for growing the economy in Dorset and, indeed, the wider south-west.

Chris Grayling: De-trunked roads are an important priority for me. We are shaping our plans to introduce the major road network and to start making funds available for things such as bypasses on roads that were de-trunked 20 or 30 years ago and where there is a pressing need for improvement.

Heathrow Expansion: Landing Charges

3. **Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the potential effect of increased landing charges at Heathrow Airport on the financial viability of the proposed expansion of that airport. [906264]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): I have been absolutely clear that expansion will be privately financed, and the Government have taken independent expert advice which demonstrated that expansion is capable of being financed without Government support. I have been clear that airport charges must be controlled, which is why I set out in 2016 that expansion should be delivered with airport charges remaining as

close as possible to current levels. It is the Civil Aviation Authority's job to enforce that, and I am certain that it will do so.

Ruth Cadbury: The Airports Commission has indicated that landing charges would have to rise by around 70% per passenger, and British Airways has warned that any such increase would make many routes from Heathrow no longer commercially viable. Would that not have significant consequences for regional connections and/or increase ticket prices for passengers?

Chris Grayling: We have of course been working to ensure that the cost of the original scheme was brought down in order to avoid a 70% rise in landing charges, but I have been clear that the requirement to set aside around 15% of slots for regional connections is non-negotiable and fixed. It will not be possible to change those slots to long-haul destinations because they are an essential part of the reform.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): When will the flightpaths be published?

Chris Grayling: I expect that we will complete plans for airspace modernisation over the coming months. There will be a rolling programme in the early 2020s, and I expect details of that plan to be made clear, probably in 2019.

M65 Extension

4. **Graham P. Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of extending the M65 from Colne to Keighley. [906265]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): Highways England has gathered evidence about the performance of the strategic road network, and future pressures on it, to inform the decisions we have taken as part of the second road investment strategy. This process of evidence gathering and public consultation has taken into consideration the idea of extending the M65.

Graham P. Jones: The Secretary of State has invested in the idea of a rail link between Liverpool and Hull, connecting the east and west through the central low Pennines. Do the Government accept that a road link would be complementary? It would go through deprived communities and provide a huge economic uplift. Do the Government recognise that this is the great northern powerhouse project?

Jesse Norman: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we are already investing £1.5 billion in road systems in the north-west. Of course the M65 is, in a way, a legendary road because it ends in a carpark, and no one thinks that is a satisfactory arrangement. I would welcome a further conversation with him about this, but the situation is far from straightforward.

John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): Will Ministers also look favourably on restoring a rail link between Keighley and Colne by restoring the Skipton to Colne rail link,

starting in the Government Chief Whip's constituency? Will they look carefully at the feasibility study that is under way?

Jesse Norman: That is something we will certainly be looking at carefully.

Leaving the EU: Ports

5. **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on the level of transport-related activity at ports of the UK leaving the EU. [906266]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): UK ports are adaptive and market-oriented. They are ready to facilitate growth in trade when we leave the EU. Over the medium and longer-term, patterns of maritime and inland traffic may be affected by the trade agreements we reach with the EU and with countries elsewhere. It is too early to predict in detail what those patterns will be, but ports nationwide are prepared for all likely eventualities.

Steve Double: The stunningly picturesque river port of Fowey is a magnet for visitors by both land and sea, but it is also a busy commercial port that ships the world's finest china clay around the world. How will the Department's recently published port connectivity study assist small river ports like Fowey?

Chris Grayling: As we plan infrastructure improvements over the coming years, I want us to look at how we best connect, in the most effective way possible, the ports upon which our country depends, both large and small. Of course, my hon. Friend will be aware that we are already demonstrating our commitment to improving the road network in his area, with the planned completion of the new link road up to the A30.

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): The Government have moved from saying they want trade with the EU post Brexit to be tariff-free to saying that they want it to be as tariff-free as possible. In which sectors of the economy and industry does the Secretary of State think it will be acceptable for there to be tariffs?

Mr Speaker: In relation to ports.

Chris Grayling: As the hon. Lady will be aware, this is not really a transport matter. Our ports will be ready, and our plans for how we manage our borders will be ready for all eventualities, but I want, I believe and I expect that we will have a sensible agreement with the European Union that avoids the charging of tariffs. That is certainly what the EU wants, and it is what we want.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): My Inverclyde constituency has a thriving port at Greenock, with cruise ships and container ships docking on a daily basis. Can the Secretary of State assure me that the systems, including IT systems, that will be required post Brexit are well on their way to completion so that ports such as Greenock will not be adversely affected by the UK leaving the European Union?

Chris Grayling: The answer is yes but, of course, most of our ports are well used to dealing with traffic from both inside and outside the European Union. Those handling freight move it through extremely quickly and effectively, and they have great expertise in doing so. I am very optimistic that our ports will do a great job in the post-Brexit world.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In his opening remarks the Secretary of State said it is too early to predict the effects on transport at ports. That is ridiculous, considering that we will leave the EU in March 2019. Half of his Cabinet is arguing for a no-deal Brexit, so it is coming at us really fast. We already know it is predicted that an extra two minutes of checks at Dover would result in 30-mile tailbacks, so what is he doing to put in place IT systems and border infrastructure systems that allow joined-up, continued free movement?

Chris Grayling: The Government and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs are doing extensive work for all eventualities. As I have previously said in the House, we do not intend to impose any form of hard border in Dover. It would be logistically impossible to do so, and therefore any flow of customs through Dover in the post-Brexit world will have to be managed in an online, electronic way. It is not possible to create fixed systems at Dover.

Transport Infrastructure

6. **Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of operationally efficient transport infrastructure on levels of productivity. [906267]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): Transport infrastructure has an important role to play in helping to increase our productivity. That is why we have set out to more than double our capital investment in transport over the decade to 2020, and why it is a central part of our industrial strategy.

Gillian Keegan: Many of my constituents in Chichester and the surrounding area lose hours and hours each week sitting in traffic on the A27. That has a knock-on negative impact on productivity, the local economy and the environment. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that road investment decisions for areas such as Chichester, which are already over capacity, are prioritised in the road infrastructure investments for 2020 to 2025?

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has been doing a fantastic job of trying to get the A27 project back on track. I am absolutely aware of its importance to her constituency and to the south coast. It is important that the community in Chichester reaches a consensus about the right option, and of course I then want to see the project go ahead.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State knows the effect on productivity in places such as Yorkshire and my constituency. On the 70th anniversary of the NHS, when we wish all those workers a very good day, is it not a fact that many of

them are struggling to get to work because of his policies and his lack of sense of direction on transport infrastructure?

Chris Grayling: Actually it is this Government who are investing in rail and are providing new trains right across the north; who have just opened the last stretch of motorway-grade road between London and Newcastle; who are investing money in smart motorways; and who are putting money into Leeds, to ensure better connectivity there, and into towns and cities around the north. I wish Opposition Members would start to talk up the north and the improvements that are happening, rather than talking it down and pretending nothing is happening.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I have a wonderful piece of transport infrastructure in my constituency called Blackpool airport. Will the Secretary of State tell me what steps will be taken to ensure that with a third runway at Heathrow, we will see improved connectivity to my part of the north-west?

Chris Grayling: This is why I am committed to saying that the 15% of slots set aside for regional connections are set in stone. We are not going to see those suddenly disappear from 15% to 10% to 5%, with routes diverted elsewhere. The expansion of Heathrow is a really important part of delivering improvements right around the United Kingdom, and I am committed to making sure that happens.¹

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): This summer, my constituents who commute by rail have had to put with up with delays, cancellations and ineffective bus services as a result of work on the great western main line, and we now learn that equipment is rusting in the Severn tunnel. Although the infrastructure investment is welcome, will the Minister ensure that this is not an excuse for train operating companies to provide a reduced quality service? Will he also ensure that there is no more disruption than there needs to be?

Chris Grayling: This is one of the great conundrums. We are spending money around the country and it is impossible to deliver investment without some disruption. I absolutely would not accept a train company using that as an opportunity to do things that are not right for passengers, but we have to accept that if we are going to modernise different parts of our road and rail infrastructure, some disruptive consequences are inevitable, however much we might wish that was not the case.

E10 Fuel

8. **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What representations he has received on the introduction of provisions relating to E10 fuel since the consultation on the alternative fuels infrastructure directive. [906270]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): The Department absolutely recognises, as the Government do, the importance of clean air, and established a working group with the fuel industry and others in November 2017 to look at issues relating to the potential introduction of E10 fuel. This group has also considered the new fuel labelling requirements introduced by the alternative fuels infrastructure directive. We intend to consult on proposals later this year and, in some cases, potentially very soon.

1. [Official Report, 12 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 8MC.]

Nic Dakin: The forthcoming mandatory changes to pump labelling are the perfect opportunity to consider introducing E10. Will the Minister confirm that there will be a question in that consultation that allows people to respond on introducing E10 in the future?

Jesse Norman: I can certainly confirm that we will be consulting shortly on E10 and that we are looking closely at the issue of fuel labelling, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, has to be addressed relatively quickly.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that what is really needed is an overall, measured, strategic approach to the propulsion mix for vehicles? That will rightly include E10, but it will also include diesel. What has been so damaging to that industry has been the Government's war on diesel, which has been hugely damaging to our automotive sector, as well as our engine manufacturing.

Jesse Norman: I can only salute the right hon. Gentleman's expertise in crowbarring a question about diesel into exchanges about E10. We are taking a strategic approach. We introduced changes to the renewable transport fuel obligation earlier this year. We have changed the status of the crop cap. We are pushing for the increased use of waste-based biofuels, and we are supporting the introduction of higher-performance fuels in other sectors of the transport world.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) did mention diesel, which is a fuel, so I am not sure that a crowbar was altogether required. It is a matter of terminological preference, I think.

A12: Gallows Corner Roundabout

9. **Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con):** If he will take steps to ensure the improvement of safety at the Gallows Corner roundabout on the A12. [906271]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): As my hon. Friend will know, the A12 in London is managed by Transport for London as part of its route network. The Department for Transport consultation on proposals for the creation of a major road network was launched in December and included an indicative network of the expected future major roads. That included the A12 and A127 at Gallows Corner. We aim to publish a consultation response this summer. The roads forming the final major roads network will be confirmed by the end of 2018.

Andrew Rosindell: The Minister will be aware that the Gallows Corner flyover at the A127-A12 junction is a very congested accident hotspot. The hopelessly inadequate response from TfL and the Mayor of London should be dealt with by the national Government. Will money from the national highways budget be used so that the Government can step in to help us to resolve this ongoing problem?

Jesse Norman: My hon. Friend has regularly and properly raised this issue. It is a matter for TfL, but I am happy to have a further conversation with him about how we can look into it.

Road Congestion

10. **Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con):** What plans he has to reduce road congestion. [906272]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Government are in the middle of a £23 billion programme of investment to upgrade our strategic road network. We are also investing money in pinch points, with an additional £220 million going to tackle them last year. Throughout the country, that money is being used for smaller local projects such as junction improvements that can really make a difference to traffic flows.

Sir Greg Knight: Is my right hon. Friend aware that some councils cause avoidable congestion themselves by the use of unnecessary and poorly-phased traffic lights? Will he encourage local authorities to audit their traffic-light usage to see whether some can be switched off? Will he also encourage the greater use of traffic-sensitive traffic lights?

Chris Grayling: I agree with both those points. Traffic lights play an important part in the management of traffic flows, but if they are synchronised in the wrong way or used in the wrong way, they can make things worse, rather than better. I absolutely join my right hon. Friend in sending to councils the message that they should keep traffic-light usage under constant review.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): The chaos on Northern rail is apparent, but even had there not been the timetabling problems, the Northern rail and trans-Pennine franchises were let on a no-growth basis. Does the Secretary of State now realise that it was a mistake to let rail franchises on a no-growth basis and that it led to road congestion?

Mr Speaker: That was an extraordinarily interesting question, but we were supposed to be talking about road congestion.

Graham Stringer: I did mention road congestion, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Oh, did you? I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I heard a reference to rail electrification.

Graham Stringer: I was pointing out that particular franchises led to road congestion.

Mr Speaker: Ah, causality, no less.

Graham Stringer: Precisely.

Chris Grayling: It is simply not true that the Northern franchise was let on a no-growth basis, although it was under the Labour party when it was in power. One reason why we have had the timetable problems, apart from the delay to the electrification—the investment that we are putting into the railway line from Manchester to Blackpool—is that we were in May introducing hundreds of new services, additional services and longer trains throughout the Northern rail region. That is hardly a zero-growth franchise.

Mr Speaker: One thing is clear to me: if the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) encounters road congestion, his antidote to it is to pursue what might be called an indirect route.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): One thing that would reduce road congestion is, of course, getting people out of their cars and on to their bikes. We very much welcome the upgrade of the A358 in Taunton, but does the Secretary of State agree that whatever route is chosen by Highways England, the provision of adequate cycling infrastructure should very much be part of upgrades?

Chris Grayling: I always hope that when a new road is put in place, provision will be made for other users—cyclists and pedestrians—alongside that road, particularly in respect of a major road like the A358. That new road will of course mean that there is substantial additional capacity on the old road, which will become much less congested, but I am sure that Highways England will be looking carefully into how it can make provision for all road users.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The A38 from Exeter to Plymouth closes too often owing to accidents and congestion. Will the Secretary of State look favourably on funding bids from Plymouth City Council and Tory-run Devon County Council to upgrade this road, address accident blackspots and start the much needed process of extending the M5 from Exeter to Plymouth?

Chris Grayling: I am obviously aware of the pressures on the A38 and, indeed, of the pressures on roads north and west from Plymouth. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) who, last week, made a very strong argument to me when I visited Cornwall for improvements to the west of Plymouth. That is something that we are looking at very carefully.

Rail Disruption: Passenger Compensation

11. **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure the provision of compensation to passengers affected by recent rail disruption. [906273]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): Recent disruption on the rail service has been unacceptable and the Government have been clear that passengers will be appropriately compensated. Transport for the North has agreed that the special compensation should cover weekly, monthly and annual season ticket holders on the worst affected northern routes who experienced severe disruption before and after the May timetable change.

Paula Sherriff: Well, that all sounds very good in principle, but owing to weeks of chaos, cancellations and delays, my constituent, Alex Hodgson, has had to use a significant proportion of his annual leave. He is still being passed between departments at TransPennine Express and has now been offered the equivalent of £1 a day compensation. Despite assurances from the Secretary of State, he and other constituents feel let down and ignored. What will the Minister do about it?

Joseph Johnson: Transport for the North has set out high-level details of the scheme, which will enable passengers who have season tickets to be compensated for up to one month's cash compensation where they have suffered severe disruption. That is in addition to the normal compensation schemes available to passengers through the delay repay mechanism.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Passengers are experiencing significant delays travelling from west to east on TransPennine Express services, owing to cancellations and other delays. Will the Minister do everything that he can to persuade TransPennine Express to improve these services and to offer proper compensation? Season ticket holders in Yorkshire are getting one week's compensation, whereas those in the north-west are getting one month's compensation. That does not seem fair.

Joseph Johnson: Transport for the North has determined that passengers on the most severely affected routes, principally on Northern services, will get four weeks' cash compensation, as my hon. Friend rightly said, and those on the less severely affected routes, which happen to be in Yorkshire, will receive one week's cash compensation. That is a matter for Transport for the North.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): The National Audit Office revealed that the Minister's Department has allowed Govia Thameslink Railway to buy out its liabilities for poor performance through to September 2018. The Public Accounts Committee has concluded that the threat to strip GTR of its franchise is not a credible one. What can he do to protect passengers from a continuation of the current appalling performance if the 15 July interim timetable fails to bring stability?

Joseph Johnson: Rail operating companies will be held responsible for that portion of performance for which they are responsible and accountable, and that is now under way. The Secretary of State has set in train a hard review of GTR, and at the end of that hard review, all appropriate options will be on the table and available to the Secretary of State and to the whole Government.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It was a Labour Government who established the NHS, and today we thank all who have served in it since.

Following the Secretary of State's statement on the timetable chaos to the House on 4 June, he said in his response to the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) that, with regard to compensation, the train operating companies

"will have to meet the cost of that."—[*Official Report*, 4 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 59.]

That is so untrue. It is Network Rail that will be funding the compensation. Last year alone, it paid out £482 million through schedules 4 and 8. Does the Minister agree that, while the operating companies write the cheques, it is the state that pays?

Joseph Johnson: The Secretary of State has always been clear that we will review where responsibility lies, and the rail industry will be responsible for undertaking that appropriate compensation to make sure that passengers have the right redress. As Members will be aware, the

rail industry is partly in public control through Network Rail and partly run by private operators. Each will pay its fair share.

Rachael Maskell: Astonishing. Network Rail paying compensation means that this is coming from the public, so, in effect, passengers will be funding their own compensation for delayed and cancelled trains, for missing exams, for being sacked from their jobs or for lost business revenue—passengers paying their own compensation. How much has the Minister budgeted for to pay compensation for the Secretary of State's decision to press ahead with this rail timetable chaos, or will he instead cut more Network Rail projects to pay for it?

Joseph Johnson: As I have already said, the compensation involves four weeks' cash compensation for passengers on the most severely disrupted routes on Northern services and one week's compensation further afield in Yorkshire. Similarly, GTR announced yesterday a comparable package of special compensation for passengers on the most affected Thameslink and Great Northern routes.

Rail Services: Congleton

12. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What progress has been made on improving rail services in Congleton constituency. [906274]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): As part of the improvements to Northern Rail services, there are more frequent, hourly Sunday stopping services from Stoke to Manchester via Macclesfield. Congleton station will benefit from full waiting room refurbishment, new seating, customer information systems, new and improved signage and new ticket vending machines.

Fiona Bruce: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply—and all that in the north. It is encouraging that, after years of local campaigning by my constituents, a strategic outline business case has been developed for enhancing the mid-Cheshire rail line, including reopening Middlewich railway station in that growing town. What assurance can the Secretary of State give me that funding is available for this vital development work?

Chris Grayling: There are two routes in the north that I feel particularly keen to look at seriously reopening. One is the line from Skipton to Colne. The other is the line that passes through Middlewich in my hon. Friend's constituency that, in my view, should be a commuter railway into Manchester. Transport for the North has been working on the options, and I am committed to ensuring that we take that work forward.

Passenger Rail Usage

13. **Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in passenger rail usage. [906275]

16. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in passenger rail usage. [906280]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): With two decades of almost unbroken growth, we have seen rail passenger journeys more than double since the mid-1990s. For the first time since 2009-10, statistics from the Office of Rail and Road show a small decline in rail journeys over the past year, although passenger kilometres have continued to increase.

Jo Stevens: Rail passenger usage is falling. Is it any wonder that my constituents in Cardiff Central are giving up on using the trains, when a standard return rail ticket to London for a morning meeting costs £235? With that money, they could fly from our Welsh Labour Government-owned Cardiff airport to Barcelona and back three times and still have change for a taxi home.

Joseph Johnson: The Government are conscious of the cost of fares to the travelling public. For that reason, we have ensured that fares have risen at a lower rate than they did under the last Labour Government. The causes of the decline in season ticket numbers are complex. Although the statistics show a fall in journeys made using season tickets, there has been an increase in journeys made using other ticket types over the past year. Factors such as strikes, station closures and weather have had an impact on season ticket use.

Justin Madders: After years of campaigning, my constituents in Neston were delighted when they heard that the new Borderlands franchise would include a half-hourly service on the Wrexham to Bidston line. However, that joy was tempered somewhat with the news that the new service might not stop at every station. Given that a frequent and reliable service is vital for the residents of Neston, will the Minister join me in writing to his Welsh counterpart to impress on him the need for this service to stop at every station?

Joseph Johnson: I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he engage the Welsh Government in Wales, who have primary responsibility for specifications to that service.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Given growing demand for rail travel from Kettering, will the Rail Minister ensure that there is more capacity on local train services under the new midland main line franchise?

Joseph Johnson: I would be delighted to engage with my hon. Friend on that question. We are investing substantially in midlands services and ensuring that new trains provide extra capacity and reduced journey times.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The most recent assessment must be that passenger rail usage is down, because people cannot get into London today. Can the Minister tell us why that is?

Joseph Johnson: Yes, I can tell my right hon. Friend why that is. There has been a major signalling outage on the Brighton main line service, which has affected services throughout the network. Although this is the responsibility of Network Rail, the situation has affected services substantially on the Brighton main line. That is why we are investing £300 million in this route, with work starting in the coming months.

Mr Speaker: The concept of a signalling outage was previously unknown to me, but I suppose that it merely reinforces one in the knowledge that one learns something new every day.

Sir Desmond Swayne: What will they think of next?

Mr Speaker: One wonders.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): May I take this opportunity to convey my very best wishes to the NHS—the greatest social achievement in British history—and also to convey my best wishes and a happy birthday to my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell)?

Quite clearly from yesterday's PMQs, the Prime Minister is clueless about the sharp decline in bus ridership that her Government have presided over. I hope that the Secretary of State has a better analysis of the collapse in rail passenger usage—although I am not holding my breath. Can he explain last month's figures from the Office of Rail and Road that show the biggest fall in passenger journeys since privatisation? Is he not alarmed that there were 2 million fewer journeys on GTR year on year and millions fewer journeys on South Western Railway?

Joseph Johnson: As I said, the decline in passenger journeys is a relatively recent phenomenon. Passenger kilometres continue to grow. It is difficult to determine exactly why we have this decline in season tickets, but we believe that it is due to factors such as strikes and recent station closures. In areas outside of London where there have not been those factors, we have not seen similar declines in passenger journeys.

Andy McDonald: Poor, very poor. The fact that the Minister is not more alarmed by this sorry state of affairs will be of great concern to millions of long-suffering passengers. It has never been clearer that there is something very seriously wrong with the railways on his watch, with franchising failure, timetabling chaos, broken promises on investment and people shifting from rail to road. He says that he does not run the trains—which is self-evident, by the way—but, for goodness' sake, does he not realise that he has to step in and get a grip before our great railway hits the buffers?

Joseph Johnson: Labour's policies of nationalisation would be no panacea for the challenges we face. Indeed, those challenges spring to a very large extent from the publicly owned parts of the rail industry—namely, Network Rail, the part that is in state control. We see passenger interests as best served by bringing together in partnership the very best of the public and private sectors, as the Secretary of State set out in his strategic vision for rail last November.

Mr Speaker: A sentence perhaps—Mr Dan Carden.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Northern powerhouse rail would transform rail journeys for passengers in Liverpool, with journey times to Manchester cut to 20 minutes, but it simply cannot happen without the electrification of the trans-Pennine

line. So instead of playing party politics with the numbers, does the Minister not realise that his Government will be judged on the major infrastructure projects that they complete?

Joseph Johnson: We are just completing the £1 billion investment in the great north rail project, which included significant electrification of the Liverpool to Manchester route. We are now about to embark on the next control period for rail, in which we will spend £2.9 billion on the trans-Pennine route upgrade. This is the single largest enhancement programme across the entire country, representing a third of all such spending.

Rail Network: Devon and Cornwall

14. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): If he will make an assessment of the role of the rail network in Devon and Cornwall in supporting the economy of the south-west.

[906276]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): The rail network plays a vital part in supporting our economy across the country, including in Devon and Cornwall. That is why we are investing more than £400 million in the rail network in the south-west. This includes a fleet of brand-new trains for services to Devon and Cornwall.

Kevin Foster: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware from our recent discussions that there is real disquiet in Devon and Cornwall about the references to it in recent consultation about the future of the CrossCountry franchise. Can he reassure me that there is no intention of ending vital direct services from key locations such as Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol to the heart of south Devon's English riviera?

Joseph Johnson: As I said to my hon. Friend when we discussed this issue a few days ago, the south-west is a vital part of our rail network. I am looking forward to discussing these issues with him further, as well as with the Peninsula Rail Task Force, which I hope to meet next week when I am in Cornwall discussing rail issues. The CrossCountry franchise offers passengers the ability to travel to Birmingham and on to the north-east and Scotland, or they can change at stations en route to connect on to trains that take them to other parts of the country.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Minister just mentioned the Peninsula Rail Task Force. In the Government's response to the recommendations in February, they said:

"we will look at improving connectivity between the Peninsula, Bristol and beyond".

However, as we have just heard, that does not sound like it is happening, particularly with the CrossCountry franchise. Can the Minister explain what is meant by "improving connectivity"?

Joseph Johnson: No decisions have been taken on any options for the next franchise. This consultation is a way for us to gather the views of the travelling public and of Members of the House, so that we have the best-informed choice of possible options when we take those decisions.

A19: Collisions

15. **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of collisions on the A19 in the North East. [906279]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): On a point of information, the NHS was brought into policy by William Beveridge, a Liberal, and it was framed in law in a White Paper by Sir Henry Willink, a Conservative. It is therefore—[*Interruption.*] It ill becomes the Labour party on the 70th birthday to make a party political issue of the national health service.

Mr Speaker: Order. I indulged the Minister, who is an historian and a philosopher, and these are matters of argument. If I may say so, Mr McDonald, you are almost unfailingly a good-natured person. You are, in addition, one of the most excitable denizens of the House. I do not know whether you rejoice in that status or regard it as an accolade, but there it is.

Jesse Norman: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. I think I can calm the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) by giving my answer to the question asked.

Highways England's 2017 regional safety report assessed the safety performance of all the routes in the Yorkshire and north-east region, including the A19. The A19 is performing well compared with other routes of its type, but Highways England is not complacent, and a number of further studies and safety improvement schemes are planned.

Mr Hepburn: Happy 70th anniversary to the NHS—an institution that was opposed every step of the way by the Tories when the Labour party brought it in. Can I bring the Minister's attention to the "Safe A19" campaign run by my local newspapers, the *Shields Gazette* and the *Sunderland Echo*, and supported by myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris)? It is of no surprise to anybody that the number of incidents and accidents on that road is linked to the fact that roads in the north get half the amount of investment as roads in the south-east. What is the Minister doing to protect the people of the north-east?

Jesse Norman: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we take all issues of safety very seriously, and the same is true in the case of the A19. I have visited the A19 and seen schemes at work. We have further work planned on it, always with safety in mind.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): The Transport Select Committee—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should ask his Question 17. [*Interruption.*] I could have linked it, I suppose, but I did not.

Transport Expenditure: London and the North-east

17. **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): If he will take steps to close the gap in transport expenditure per capita between London and the north-east. [906281]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): The Government are committed to investing in infrastructure to support regional growth, and that is why we are addressing under-investment in the north with the biggest investment programme for a generation. The Infrastructure and Projects Authority's analysis shows that between 2018 and 2021, central Government transport spend per head is in fact highest in the north-west.

Grahame Morris: The Transport Select Committee has found that a disproportionate amount of transport funding is being spent in the capital, at the expense of the regions. What steps will the Minister take to close the gap and to specifically address issues highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr Hepburn), including the "Safe A19" campaign, the Seaton Lane A19 junction improvement and ensuring that east Durham gets a rail halt at Horden?

Joseph Johnson: The Government are investing substantial sums in the north—£13 billion in the five years to 2020—and in the next control period for rail, we will invest £2.9 billion on the trans-Pennine upgrade alone. The hon. Gentleman, I am afraid, is factually wrong to say that Government investment per head in London and the south exceeds that of similar investment in the north. IPA analysis shows that for the three years to 2021, the north will receive £1,039 per head, which is £10 more than similar figures for the south of England.¹

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

18. **Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): When he plans to make a decision on the preferred route for the Oxford to Cambridge expressway. [906282]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): We expect to make a decision on the preferred corridor for the Oxford to Cambridge expressway this summer. There then has to be further work on the detailed route within that corridor.

Layla Moran: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. Given that any of these routes will have an enormous impact on both communities and the environment, does he not share my concern that the public have not been consulted at all?

Chris Grayling: No roads can be built without public consultation. We are working out in broad measure which route a corridor might follow, so that we can then do detailed consultation with the public.

Bus Routes: England and Wales

19. **Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of bus routes in England and Wales. [906283]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Whether for commuting to work or seeing friends and family, buses play an important role in keeping communities connected, with 4.4 billion passenger journeys a year. Between 2015 and 2017, the number of live local bus services registered increased by 14% in England and by 6% in Wales.

1. [*Official Report, 9 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 4MC.*]

Rosie Duffield: My constituents have had to face a 480% rise in the cost of their children's bus passes in the past five years. The No. 14 bus connecting Canterbury to rural east Kent villages was cut in September, and replaced by only a twice-daily bus service. This is just one of the cuts proposed by Kent County Council. What steps is the Minister taking to protect much needed rural bus routes from being cut by cash-strapped local authorities?

Ms Ghani: Local authorities receive a substantial amount of money from central Government to support bus services. The Government paid out some £250 million last year to support bus services in England. Kent County Council receives over £1 million per year, and Canterbury City Council receives over £83,000 per year. The hon. Lady mentioned bus fares. They rose almost three times faster every year under Labour than under the Conservatives, with local bus fares across Great Britain rising by an average of 1.9% each year in real terms. Bus fares go up under Labour.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman from the Opposition Front Bench needs to be very brief, because time is against us, but we are happy to hear from the fella.

Matt Rodda: May I, too, wish the NHS a very happy birthday?

Nearly 500 bus routes have been cut every year under this Government, snatching away a lifeline from elderly, disabled and young people, as well as from rural communities, yet the Government seem unaware of the impact of these cuts. I have to say that the Prime Minister floundered yesterday, and sought to blame local authorities. Does the Minister share that view, or does she accept the undeniable truth that her Government have totally mismanaged bus provision in this country?

Ms Ghani: Bus passes for the most vulnerable, older and disabled people are being supported by this Government with £1 billion, enabling 10 million people up and down this country to travel for free. As you may be aware, Mr Speaker, this is Catch the Bus Week, so the hon. Gentleman could have said something about bus services to encourage people to jump on the bus. There are good case studies up and down the country. In Liverpool, for example, young people are taking buses 142% more than they did in the previous three years. In Bristol, bus patronage has gone up by 42%, and in South Gloucestershire by 38%. There are good case histories of places up and down this country where bus patronage is going up.

Matt Rodda: I appreciate the fact that the hon. Lady has mentioned Catch the Bus Week. Rural communities have been hit particularly hard by the crisis in our bus services. Interestingly, we have visited Northamptonshire—bankrupt Tory Northamptonshire, I should say—which has one of the worst track records for cutting services. What would the Minister say to the resident I met yesterday, who told me there is no bus to take her child to school and that an older daughter has been unable to take up her preferred job option because there is no bus service?

Ms Ghani: Bus service provision is the responsibility of local authorities. About £800 million of funding is made available for concessionary bus fares, and £40 million is given directly to local authorities to support journeys that might not otherwise be profitable. As I mentioned earlier, there are local authorities working hand in hand with bus companies to make sure services are viable and attractive. May I just mention one? In Brighton and Hove, bus patronage has gone up by 22% since 2009-10.

Mr Speaker: The Minister is a treasure trove of previously unearthed information, for which we are extremely grateful.

Topical Questions

T1. [906287] **Sandy Martin** (Ipswich) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): May I take this opportunity to thank Members on both sides of the House for the support they gave last week to the vote on the expansion of Heathrow airport? I think that sent a powerful message about the future of our country. The support came from the Government side of the House, the Opposition, the parties in Northern Ireland and Scottish Conservatives, and it was a resounding vote for the country's future.

Sandy Martin: Although Greater Anglia and the Government both say that they want 15 minutes to be the trigger period for passenger compensation, travellers from Ipswich are still unable to claim any compensation until their trains are more than 30 minutes late. Given the number of failed trains, failing overhead wires, failing rails, failing points and failing signals, when will the Secretary of State rectify this anomaly and ensure that my constituents can claim the compensation that is readily available to passengers in the rest of the country?

Chris Grayling: The move across the country to repayment after a 15-minute delay is being phased in with new franchises that will start over the coming years. I say to passengers in East Anglia that every single train there is being replaced with a brand new one. That will improve performance, stop the blight of broken down old trains, and mean a much better travelling experience.

T4. [906291] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): As I have said to Ministers previously, urgent repair works are required on the North bridge at Oundle to avoid a weight limit being introduced that would badly affect those who use the bus services, businesses, and the community more generally. What Government support is available to get such work done urgently, particularly in exceptional financial circumstances such as those currently faced by Northamptonshire?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): My hon. Friend has been a tireless campaigner on this issue, and I absolutely recognise his point. This is, in law, a matter for local government. We have provided them with some funding, and I would be delighted to have a further conversation with my hon. Friend about other ways in which we could consider the situation.

T3. [906289] **Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): In a deregulated bus system, local authorities have no control over routes and fares, and the amount of money for tendered services is being cut by 45%. How can the Prime Minister justify her statement that local authorities should be improving bus services? Will the Secretary of State give the Prime Minister a lesson in how the bus service system works?

Chris Grayling: What I will do is give a lesson to Labour Mayors about the reforms that we put in place in the last Parliament, which gave them franchising powers. The hon. Gentleman might like to ask the Mayor of Greater Manchester why his promise on bus franchising is years away from happening—the last estimate I heard was that it might just about be completed by 2023, which is way after his first term of office, and way after he made that commitment.

T9. [906296] **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government have no intention of allowing direct flights between the United Kingdom and the northern part of Cyprus?

Chris Grayling: Let me be clear: all Members of the House would like to see a long-term solution to the issues on the island of Cyprus. This country will continue to work with our friends in Cyprus to try to achieve that goal, but our policies on flights have not changed.

T5. [906292] **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The east coast franchise is now run with the part publicly-owned London North Eastern Railway, and it is a major transport operation in Scotland. Despite that, the UK Government have not allowed any Scottish Government representation on the board. Will the Secretary of State rethink that, and commit to ensuring that the Scottish Government are represented on that vital piece of infrastructure?

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): The London North Eastern Railway started operations on 24 June. We are in the process of establishing the east coast partnership board, and we will ensure independent representation on that board. We are in consultation with stakeholders across the length and breadth of the line to ensure that their views are taken into account in the management of that new operation.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): In Redditch there are only two electric vehicle charging points, but nearby Coventry has 25. Redditchians are just as keen as Coventrians to take advantage of electric cars. What are the Government doing to help them?

Jesse Norman: My hon. Friend is right to focus on charging points. We have a large charging point network, and we are rapidly expanding it. As she knows, we have just announced a local charging infrastructure fund of £400 million. A lot of work is being done with local authorities, and I encourage her to work with us to develop further charging points in her area.

T6. [906293] **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Today's *Financial Times* carries a warning from the British Retail Consortium about the fear of food rotting at

ports as a result of a no-deal Brexit. What is the Secretary of State doing about that, and how will he ensure that our ports are not left in chaos?

Chris Grayling: As I keep saying clearly, we do not intend to put in place measures that would create long incoming queues at our ports. Our ports successfully support inward trade from around the world, and in the post-Brexit world we have no intention of changing that.

Mr Speaker: Andrew Jones—I call Mr Jones.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): You normally call me Andrew Jones, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I did say Andrew Jones.

Andrew Jones: I beg your pardon.

Mr Speaker: Know thyself, man. Well done.

Andrew Jones: Thank you. May I first welcome today's announcement of an HS2 depot in Leeds, which is welcome news for the northern powerhouse? The A59 at Kex Gill is an important trans-Pennine route, and its closure is impacting on residents and businesses in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss what support the Government can provide to North Yorkshire County Council to carry out works on that site, including its potential re-routing?

Mr Speaker: I say gently to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) that one of his most endearing qualities is his gentleness and modesty. However, he should not be quite so modest—he is, after all, a distinguished former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for buses, and that was a motivational factor in my calling him to ask a supplementary at Transport questions.

Jesse Norman: I, too, share my hon. Friend's delight at the news about the HS2 depot. I would be delighted to meet my distinguished former colleague.

T7. [906294] **Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State explain how the decision to award the Wales & Borders franchise is made solely by the Welsh Government? This is a main commuter route for my constituents into Manchester and Warrington, but we have no say over it. Is it not ludicrous that decisions about English rail passenger services are being made exclusively in Wales?

Chris Grayling: We have taken care—this is a genuine issue—to ensure that the Welsh Government, while they control the letting of the franchise, do not have the power to degrade services within England. That is very important. The Department holds clear responsibilities for making sure the Welsh do not take decisions that adversely affect the English.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Heathrow flights are capped at 480,000 flights a year. That was set as a condition of the 2001 terminal 5 planning consent. Will the Secretary of State confirm that there are no plans to override the existing cap for existing runways?

Chris Grayling: I have had no requests to do so.

T8. [906295] **Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Many of my constituents have had to endure a consistently poor and wholly unacceptable train service from GTR-Great Northern since the new timetable was introduced on 20 May. Does the Minister agree that the time has come to end the franchise for GTR-Great Northern and allow the Mayor of London to take over the running of the service, so that my constituents can get into London to work, study and get on with their lives without travelling being such an ordeal?

Joseph Johnson: The service on GTR's Thameslink services has indeed been unacceptable. A hard review is under way, which will give the Secretary of State all options when it concludes. With respect to the size of that franchise, the Secretary of State has also indicated that he is open to breaking it up once the Thameslink programme is in place and when that franchise comes to an end in 2021. He has had discussions with the Mayor of London about some services moving to Transport for London.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): We are approaching the summer and traffic will be driving down the M20. I am sure that you, like me, Mr Speaker, will wish to have a speedy exit towards the coast. Will the Minister explain what he is doing on the smart motorways programme on the M20 to ensure not just that it works but that communities are protected from noise?

Jesse Norman: I am very glad my hon. Friend mentions noise, because that is a topic of great interest to us. We are actively exploring whether we can bring to local concerns about noise-capturing the same kind of concerns we are bringing to the structure of the highway.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): Delays, non-accessible platforms, cancelled trains, failed investment—would the Secretary of State like me to add broken promises of electrification to the list of issues with the trans-Pennine route for my constituents?

Chris Grayling: We have already modernised the line from Liverpool to Manchester and we are about to start a £3 billion modernisation of the railway line from Manchester to Leeds to York, so I make no apology to the people of the north for the fact that we are spending £3 billion on upgrading their railway line when the Labour party, when it was in office, did absolutely nothing.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): As we reach the halfway point through the Year of Engineering, will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking all those who have joined the campaign so far and encourage those who have yet to get on board to join up and make 2018 the success I know it can be?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I thank my hon. Friend for his question, especially as he is the ambassador for the Year of Engineering. We are working with 1,400 companies up and down the country to create 1 million interactions

to encourage young people to take STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths—and become engineers of the future.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): There are some excellent new businesses housed in railway arches on the Gateshead side of the High Level bridge, such as Block and Bottle, Arch Sixteen Café and the Station East Public House, but Network Rail is about to sell off the leasehold for 5,500 arches around the country. Will the Secretary of State meet me and the representatives group, Guardians of the Arches, to discuss proposals that will not ramp up rents for these new businesses and businesses around the country?

Joseph Johnson: Network Rail is in the process of managing its estate to ensure it contributes towards housing and commercial development where that is sensible. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman and the campaign group he mentions.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Will the Minister update the House on what her Department is doing to investigate the use of distributed ledger technology, such as blockchain, in the maritime sector?

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend, as you may be aware, Mr Speaker, is an intellect in blockchain, having published a report yesterday on unlocking blockchain. My officials explore new technologies such as blockchain, which may help to improve maritime trade. We have recently contributed to “Are You Decentralised Yet?”, a paper for the Transport Systems Catapult, analysing blockchain technologies and how they can benefit maritime.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): A few weeks ago, the Secretary of State for Transport said that he would be meeting the people from Newton in Bolsover regarding HS2 and the alternative to knocking down 30 houses. Will he repeat that at the Dispatch Box, in view of the altercation that took place at the last Transport questions? We do not want another broken promise, do we?

Ms Ghani: I am not quite sure exactly what meeting the hon. Gentleman is talking about. Meetings take place between HS2 and the community engagement officers up and down the route. I believe that a meeting is already taking place, but this gives me an opportunity to remind Members from across the House of the importance of HS2, as well as the 100,000 jobs that it brings with it and that it connects eight of our 10 great cities.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): Earlier this year, a joint feasibility study conducted by South Gloucestershire Council and Highways England into a new M4 junction 18A recommended a western option at Emersons Green be adopted rather than an ill-thought-out eastern option that would cut through green-belt land. For the sake of local residents, will the Secretary of State now rule out this eastern option, which nobody supports and which now needs to be erased entirely?

Jesse Norman: As my hon. Friend will know, this topic is under active consideration and consultation at the moment.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Jim Shannon—a short sentence, I feel sure.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It certainly will be, Mr Speaker. Accessibility on bus routes is important for disabled people; in particular, what has been done to help wheelchair users to access buses?

Mr Speaker: Splendid.

Ms Ghani: That very important question enables me to remind the sector and bus drivers that wheelchair spaces on buses are first and foremost for the use of wheelchair users, and other passengers must respect that.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): On the NHS's 70th birthday, can I give you the present of a spare badge, Mr Speaker? It is for the NHS, to which my family have dedicated their entire working life.

On the subject of trains, will my right hon. Friend look at extending the delay-repay system to cover the circumstances when our very popular trains are so crowded that people cannot actually get on to them, just until our new trains arrive with the extra seats?

Joseph Johnson: We do hold train operating companies to account for capacity in our monthly review of how they are performing under the terms of their franchise agreement, and remedial plans are put in place to address overcrowding when that is found to exist.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I have written to the Secretary of State about my constituent who had no access to a toilet on a bus replacement service or at any of the stops along the route between Salford and Preston. She is a pregnant woman, and she was forced to wet herself and then sit on the floor of the train from Preston to Glasgow because it was overcrowded and delayed. Does the Secretary of State believe that she should be compensated for that indignity?

Ms Ghani: The inclusive transport strategy, which is due to be published, will look at issues around accessibility and toilets, especially looking at changing rooms and how we can make that information more available at the appropriate time when toilets are not functioning.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I declare my interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council. Now that Kettering Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council have resolved their differences over how a new decriminalised parking system might operate, will the roads Minister issue the order to enable this to happen?

Jesse Norman: I will certainly have a further conversation with my hon. Friend about the question he raises.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Oh very well, it is always good to encourage a new young Member at the start of his parliamentary career. I call Mr Barry Sheerman.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State knows very well that millions of our people are being poisoned by the filthy emissions from buses, trucks and cars. When is he going to do something about it?

Chris Grayling: Before I respond to that question, I just say to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) that I had been under the impression that the meeting was already organised. If that is not the case, I will make sure that it is.

On clean transport, this is a central part of the Government's strategy. It is why we are spending money on supporting low-emission bus vehicles and on encouraging people to buy low-emission vehicles. When we publish our Road to Zero strategy shortly, we will be setting out more of our plans to create a greener vehicle fleet on our roads.

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before I call the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) to put his urgent question, I should remind the House—I hope it is a question of reminding the House of something of which it is already conscious—that we have very considerable pressure on the parliamentary timetable today. There is of course the business question, and there are two ministerial statements, but I have also to have regard to the level of interest in the debate on proxy voting. This urgent question will therefore not run for longer than 20 minutes. The Front Benchers must stick to time; otherwise, I am afraid they will have to be sat down. After the expiry of that 20 minutes, that's it—we will move on to the next business.

Universal Credit

10.40 am

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): Will the Secretary of State please use this opportunity to apologise for the three instances where she has dissembled on the National Audit Office report on universal credit?

Mr Speaker: Order. That is rather naughty of the right hon. Gentleman. I will say that it was an innocent error, but he is an immensely experienced Member of this House whom we all treat with great respect. The proper form in these cases is simply to read out the urgent question that is listed, not to invest the question with a degree of rhetorical licence. Anyway, I think it was probably innocent.

Frank Field: Innocent.

Mr Speaker: Very well. We will let him off this occasion.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): I had information that the question was on the letter that I received yesterday, so that is obviously where we will be going: the letter that I received yesterday. Opening the letter was a comment about a meeting that the Comptroller and Auditor General had asked to have with me. He had written to me on 27 June. Our Department got back at the end of the week and that meeting will be on Monday. There was possibly an inference from that that I had not accepted a meeting or that there was not going to be one. That was not the case, and it is diarised for Monday.

The next bit was about the information we had received, and accurate up-to-date information being shared with the Department. We agreed that information had been shared up to 6 June, but when we signed off the factual information contained within the report, we raised concerns about the context and conclusions drawn from that information and where we went from there.

That goes on to the impact of the recent changes. We looked at the impact of the changes we brought through: waiting days being abolished on 14 February, the housing benefit run-on on 11 April, and advance payments on 3 January. As I said in my apology yesterday, the impact of those changes is still being felt and the definition therefore cannot be that it has been fully taken into account by the NAO. They also talked about slowing down the process, which we always agreed with. This is about the test and learn process, and we will learn as we go along. That is what we agree with, too. The Comptroller and Auditor General also said in his letter:

“I’m also afraid that your statement in response to my report claiming Universal Credit is working had not been proven.”

That is where we differ on the conclusions. While the NAO had the same factual information either way, we came to very different conclusions because the impact of the changes we brought in at the end of that period is still being felt.

So that is where I would like to leave it—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms McVey: At the end of the letter it says that “the Department cannot measure the exact number of additional people in employment”.

We agree with that. We cannot measure the exact number of people in employment, but we knew that there was a plausible range—which we had had support on—of people going into employment. We also know that employment is increasing. Those were the key pertinent points from the letter, and obviously included with my apology yesterday for the phrasing of the words I got wrong—which I fully accept, which is why I came to the House—I will end that bit of the statement there.

Frank Field: We are grateful for the Secretary of State’s apology—again—for one aspect of her behaviour where the Comptroller and Auditor General criticised her for dissembling. There were two others. First, she told the House that the Comptroller and Auditor General had advised her to roll out faster, whereas he told her to pause so that vulnerable claimants would not be hit further. Secondly, that universal credit is working is not proven, as she said, with 40% of claimants finding themselves in financial difficulty, 25% unable to make a claim online, and 20% overall, but two thirds of disabled claimants, not being paid on time and in full, hence the demand of the Comptroller and Auditor General, a big regulator in this country, for her to pause the universal credit programme.

Ms McVey: We need to separate two parts of this. One bit is where I came myself to the House to apologise for using the wrong words. I used the words “faster rate” and “speeded up” on the premise that the report had said there was no practical alternative but to continue with universal credit and that there had been a regrettable slowing down. My interpretation of that was incorrect, which is why I came to the House yesterday and apologised for my words. We should separate that from the impact of the changes. I said—and I stand by this—that the impact of the changes could not have been felt because it was still being rolled out and those impacts were still being felt and therefore could not have been taken into account. We need to separate where I used the incorrect words, for which I came to the House to apologise, from the impacts of the changes and therefore the conclusions that can be drawn.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): While my right hon. Friend has apologised, could she confirm that the Labour party has yet to apologise for its misleading statements—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: I am sorry but questions must be about the policy of the Government, not about other people not apologising for other things. [*Interruption.*] Order. I do not need any help in these matters. I do have some experience. The hon. Lady is a most assiduous Member, but this is an exploration of Government policy and ministerial accountability to the House. It is not about the Opposition. Sorry, but that is the position.

Helen Whately *rose*—

Mr Speaker: No, the hon. Lady has already had one bite at the cherry. Let us have a masterclass from Sir Desmond Swayne.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Mr Speaker, if you complain to me that I am being too slow, am I unreasonable in assuming that you want me to go faster?

Ms McVey: I thank my right hon. Friend for the way he said that. That was my interpretation of what I read throughout the report. I therefore apologised when I checked on the words I had used—my interpretation, not the exact words in the report. I would say, however, on the subject of apologies, that I am more than happy to say, “Can I check on those words? Did I get them right? Did I get them wrong?” I then followed through: “What was the right process?” How did I do it? Nobody asked or told me to come to the House. I actually checked the words and came to the House.

Other people, it is true, have questioned and queried—even the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field). Sometimes I think we are blessed in this House that the Opposition never get anything wrong, and other MPs do not get anything wrong. Whereas I am more than happy to come and apologise if I do, it seems that sometimes other people are not so happy to come forward and apologise. Perhaps what I did that was surprising to the House was to come of my volition and apologise for my words that were wrong.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The Secretary of State should be ashamed that she has been forced to come to the House again. Yesterday the Comptroller and Auditor General took the extraordinary step of writing an open letter to her pointing out that she had misrepresented the National Audit Office report on numerous occasions. He did so after she had failed to meet him, and she did not have the courtesy to do so before this point.

The NAO report is damning of the Government’s flagship social security policy, but, instead of responding to its findings, the Secretary of State misled the House over them. The report said that universal credit is not meeting the aims set for it, and that currently there is no evidence that it ever will. Why and how did the Secretary of State come to say falsely—on two separate occasions in Parliament—that the report had said that the roll-out of universal credit should be speeded up, that the report was out of date as it did not take account of changes made by the Government in the Budget, and that universal credit was working? How can these statements be inadvertent slips of the tongue?

In response to a point of order, the Secretary of State said that she had

“meant to say that the NAO had said that there was no practical alternative to continuing with universal credit.”—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 321.]

That is quite different from saying that it should be speeded up. In fact, the report states clearly that the Government should

“ensure that the programme does not expand before business-as-usual operations can cope with higher claimant volumes”.

Has the Secretary of State ever read the NAO report? If she has, how can she have drawn the conclusions that she has?

The Secretary of State has failed to apologise in relation to the other two key points made by the Comptroller and Auditor General in his letter. Will she now do so? If she misread the report so badly, this brings into question her competence and her judgment. If she read the report and chose to misrepresent its findings, she has clearly broken the ministerial code. Either way, she should resign.

Ms McVey: Let me start from the top again. I did not fail to meet the Comptroller and Auditor General. As I have said, the letter came in on 27 June, which was last Wednesday; our office got back to him at the end of the week, and I am seeing him on Monday. So that was not correct.

As I have said, I came to the House and apologised for my interpretation of what was there and the words that I had used. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), who is no longer in the Chamber, referred to how something could be interpreted.

As I also explained, we agreed on the factual information all the way through, but it is a question of how you interpret that information, with the judgments, the summaries and the context. It was on that basis that we said, “We do not agree. We do not agree on how the findings come out together.” As I said, the effects of the significant changes that the Government had introduced this year cannot have been fully taken into account, because they are still being rolled out.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her apology. Like a number of other Members, I was very disappointed that the NAO report did not take account of the changes that the Department brought in on the basis of the recommendations made by the Select Committee. Will the Secretary of State confirm that she will continue to adapt and improve universal credit as new ideas and new evidence emerge?

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend is right. That is one of the key points, because this is one of the biggest changes in benefits. We always said that the slow roll-out would reflect the changes needed. Even within the last couple of weeks, I have made significant changes yet again. Whether they involved kinship carers, 18 to 21-year-olds and housing benefit or severe disability premiums, I made those changes after listening to people. Again, the impacts will not have taken effect yet because they are still being rolled out.

I agree that sometimes we have to do a “mea culpa”, hands up, as I did yesterday. I had the wrong words, I apologised to the House, and the apology was accepted by the House. Equally, I am more than happy and prepared when colleagues on either side of the House say, “Could you look at this? Can we look at it a bit more? Could you change this?”, and have made significant changes to this policy since I became Secretary of State.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Secretary of State appears to be willing to mislead Parliament and to get into a fight with the National Audit Office in order to protect her failing universal credit policy, but what she and none of her colleagues will admit is that the NAO report blows a hole as wide as the Clyde through everything the Tories have been saying on universal credit. The NAO felt forced into writing an open letter to put this matter straight, and I understand that this is Sir Amyas Morse’s first such letter in over a decade in service. This is an absolutely shameful state of affairs. We can all accept honest error, but the Comptroller and Auditor General points out in his letter that a

[Alison Thewliss]

number of the statements that the Secretary of State has made are without evidence, are not correct and are not proven.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Alison Thewliss: This is not about phrasing, as the Secretary of State has said, because speeding up is not the same as pausing. Did she actually read the National Audit Office report before her recent attendance in the House? And—

Mr Speaker: Thank you. [Interruption.] Order. I am a little disconcerted to see the SNP Front-Bench spokesman gesticulating at me as if to say, “What’s going on?” Forgive me, but I did say to the House very clearly that—[Interruption.] Order. It is no good shaking your head, I say to the hon. Lady, who is an extremely dextrous and committed Member of this House. She had a minute; she consumed her minute and I then move on. That is the right thing to do.

Ms McVey: We looked at the business case and looked through the conclusions, and for the £2 billion invested, there will be a £34 billion benefit to the UK economy over the next 10 years. We also foresee an increase in employment of 200,000. We believe that that is within the plausible range.

People want evidence, and we can give evidence about the changes this Government have brought through when we talk about getting people into work. We know we have got over 3.2 million people into work and we know we have got 600,000 disabled people into work in the last few years. At the time, we heard the assertions from Opposition Members. Labour said that 1 million more people would be unemployed if we pursued our policies—our changes to benefit and what else we did. That was never proved to be the case, yet I have never asked Labour to apologise for its misleading figures.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do want to accommodate a few more questioners and we must work on that basis.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Jobcentre staff across my constituency where universal credit has already been fully rolled out inform me that claimants are more likely to get into work as a result of being on universal credit. Is that a trend across the country, because that would mean it is really good that we are rolling it out, at whatever speed that might be?

Ms McVey: That is what is coming out from the data we are gathering about what real people are saying about how universal credit impacts on their lives. My hon. Friend is right to say that people are getting into work faster, staying in work longer, and looking for work. For those in work, the data shows that on average people are earning an extra £600 a year. Those are the positive effects of this benefit change.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I am staggered and disappointed that in answer to the urgent question we have a Secretary of State who

is still arguing over the detail of a report. This is an important constitutional issue. The National Audit Office is the independent watchdog of Government spending. In this case, the Secretary of State has come to the House twice and there has been an unprecedented letter from the Comptroller and Auditor General. I have had two letters from the permanent secretary adding information on what was an agreed report on 8 June. Just for the record, will the Secretary of State declare clearly in the House today that she has full confidence in the National Audit Office and the Comptroller and Auditor General?

Ms McVey: What I would say is: they do their job. He came forward—[Interruption.] We need to separate this out. We said that we shared information. We agreed on that factual information. What we said is that we had made significant changes at the latter end of that period when information was collected, and therefore the impact of that could not have been felt. Obviously, I am meeting the Comptroller and Auditor General next week. That is what is important.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State’s work in the Department—she has shown a great commitment to improving the lives of people across the country. Does she agree that the Department’s decision to take an incremental approach to the development of universal credit is exactly the right approach, and that we must cut through all this political nonsense and focus on the delivery of universal credit?

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Like most other people here, I came into politics to help people into work, probably because when I grew up in Liverpool in the ’80s it was a difficult place to grow up and lots of people were not in work. To be in this position of being able to help people to get a job is what I want. It is disconcerting and upsetting that people sometimes, just for the sheer sake of opposing, want to change good measures that are helping over 3.2 million people into work. Those are the facts; that is what we know. Conservative Members are trying to improve people’s lives.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): At Monday’s Question Time, I asked the Secretary of State two questions. On Question 5, when I asked whether she would accept the National Audit Office report’s recommendation that universal credit should not be rolled out further, she said:

“The NAO made clear quite the opposite”.—[*Official Report*, 2 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 8.]

It did not. At topical questions, I asked her to reconsider. I quoted the NAO report, but she stuck to her position. On both occasions, she told the House something that she knew was not correct. Will she apologise to me and to the House, and will she accept the NAO’s recommendation that the roll-out should be stopped now?

Ms McVey: When I answered the right hon. Gentleman’s questions, I said that the National Audit Office had said that there was no practical alternative to continuing with universal credit—that was how I answered. I will pay the right hon. Gentleman a compliment. It was due to his persistence that after I left the House I went back

and said, “I’ve used these words.” I know that this is about the impact, and I know that what I said was substantially correct, but I wanted to double check. So I double checked whether I had used the wrong words, and it was after that that I made the apology, because my interpretation, although it was right, was not based on the exact words. That is what I came to apologise for. However, I stand by the fact that the impact of our changes could not have been felt and, as the NAO said, there is no practical alternative but to continue through and the slowness with which this has gone is regrettable.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): When I visited Stockport jobcentre and met its work coaches, I found an enthusiastic group of people who are keen to make a difference to people’s lives. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating them and all jobcentre workers across the country who are so enthusiastic about transforming lives and making a difference?

Ms McVey: Everybody wants to improve people’s lives. That is what we are all here to do, and that is what our work coaches do day in, day out. I hope that you will bear with me, Mr Speaker, if I refer to a letter I received. A lone parent wrote saying, “I was frightened to go into the jobcentre from what I had heard. Eight years ago, I was in the jobcentre, and the system did not work for me, so I was relieved and happy that I now have a job. Universal credit is working.” Since then, I have been collecting all those letters, because so many people—claimants and work coaches—are saying that this system is so much better than the one before.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I suspect that the Secretary of State decided that she had to come to the House to apologise when she received the unprecedented open letter from the Comptroller and Auditor General pointing out that she had used—let us say—not correct assertions on three occasions about a report that her own officials had agreed. Will she now finally admit that she has got things very wrong on this, actually accept the National Audit Office’s conclusions, and show some respect to the NAO?

Ms McVey: If I may correct the hon. Lady, it was not to do with the letter. She incorrectly says that I came after the letter, but I asked whether I had got anything wrong and I checked things out myself. Nobody asked me or told me to come to House; I came here of my own volition. What I do not agree with—we stand by this—are the conclusions of the report in its entirety.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that universal credit simplifies the benefits system, helps to get more people back into work, and better targets financial help at those people who need it?

Ms McVey: I am happy to provide clarification: universal credit does simplify the system. It also provides the individual with more help to get a job. We know that people are getting into work quicker, staying in jobs longer, looking for work for longer and, on average, increasing their income at the end of the year by £600. That is what it is about: helping people to get on in life.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: On this occasion, Mr Lloyd, perhaps a sentence.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): That is always a challenge, Mr Speaker, but I will try.

Regrettably, I believe that the Secretary of State gave only a partial apology, because she did not take account of the fact that her own Department confirmed to the NAO on 6 June that its report was based on the most accurate and up-to-date information, yet the other day she indicated that the NAO report could be out of date. I think that that is unacceptable.

Ms McVey: Again, if I may correct the hon. Gentleman, we had agreed that that information was coming forward. What we have said is that the changes this Government have made were done in January, February and April, and therefore those changes could not be taken fully into account—those impacts are still being felt—because the period of checking was from last year to April of this year.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Like my right hon. Friend, I grew up in Liverpool in the 1980s and have a particular sensitivity to the problems caused by unemployment. Both the jobcentres that serve my constituents are fully supportive of the roll-out of universal credit, so will she maintain her focus on rolling out universal credit as the best way to help people into work and to help people in work?

Ms McVey: I did not know my hon. Friend also spent his formative years in Liverpool. There are so many Conservative Members who spent their formative years and grew up in Liverpool. [*Interruption.*] I smile because there are so many of us even in this Department.

My hon. Friend is quite right. This is what we are about: getting more people into work, which we have done—and significantly so. Now we are reaching out to help even more people, significantly so.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): For eight years Parliament’s only reliable information about the status of universal credit has come from the National Audit Office. Ministers have consistently responded with denials and cover-up statements that, as the Secretary of State has acknowledged this week, were simply untrue. Might her apology herald a new openness about the very real problems with the universal credit project?

Ms McVey: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for mentioning my openness and the fact that I was willing, by myself, to come and apologise for using the wrong words. People who know me will always say about me that I am open, that I am straight and that I say it as it is, which I will do. Equally, if we need to make more changes, which I have done from the moment I got here—I did not seek leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal because I did not feel it would have been right; and I looked at the position of kinship carers and did not think it was right, so we changed it, as we did for the 18-to-21 group—I am more than happy to change things when we can, if we can.

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): The NAO report notes that jobcentre staff have said that universal credit systems have “improved significantly” since they were first introduced. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking Sedgemoor District Council and other councils among

[James Heapey]

the first tranche to adopt universal credit for the quality of the feedback they have given, which has allowed those improvements to be delivered?

Ms McVey: I thank my hon. Friend, because nobody can do this in isolation or by themselves. We need the local councils to be on board, we need the housing associations to be on board and we need MPs to be on board—we need everybody supporting the most vulnerable. I thank him for that comment, and he is quite correct.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State agree with the National Audit Office that universal credit is moving people into debt and that the first debt is rent arrears? Claimants are not getting their rent paid and housing providers find out that a person is on universal credit only when they are in arrears. Is that not a reason why universal credit should be paused?

Ms McVey: Some of the key changes that were done during this year were the advances to provide extra support if people were in need of extra money and the two-week run-on in housing benefit. So we learnt, changed and adapted. Those things have been brought in, but only this year. Therefore, again, their impacts cannot have been felt. But we listened, we learnt, we altered and we have done.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I allowed some injury time on two accounts. The first was that I had to intervene a number of times in regularising the debate. The second was that I wanted to facilitate a reasonable number of questions, so I ran the urgent question for half an hour, rather than for 20 minutes. I am sorry that some colleagues are disappointed, but I think that was a reasonable treatment of the issue. I gather that the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) has a point of order that directly flows from the urgent question, and if he puts it extremely briefly, I will hear it, although I offer no guarantee of any response.

David Hanson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Given that the Secretary of State said that she had afforded her apology to the House on the basis of the interventions I made and my two questions on Monday, is it in order for her not to write to me, as the Member concerned, to tell me that she was making a statement and/or that she was correcting the record from Monday?

Mr Speaker: Nothing disorderly has happened. It is perfectly in order for the Secretary of State not to write to the right hon. Gentleman. In retrospect, it might have been wise for her to do so, but the past is the past and, to be fair, it is not for me to arbitrate on the merits or demerits of policy or even, outside the Chamber, of conduct. Suffice it to say that the Secretary of State did approach me and offered to come to the House yesterday, which she did. [Interruption.] She approached me the day before yesterday about coming here yesterday. She has come here today and we have had a half-hour exchange, which seems to me to be very reasonable. We must now move on to the next business.

Business of the House

11.11 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 9 JULY—Consideration of a business of the House motion, followed by proceedings on the Northern Ireland Budget (No. 2) Bill, followed by a motion to approve a money resolution on the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration Etc.) Bill.

TUESDAY 10 JULY—Consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the Non-Domestic Rating (Nursery Grounds) Bill, followed by motion to approve Standing Orders relating to the European Statutory Instruments Committee, followed by Opposition day (unallotted half day). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats, subject to be announced, followed by a debate on a motion relating to the appointment of external members to the House of Commons Commission.

WEDNESDAY 11 JULY—Opposition day (16th allotted day). There will be a debate entitled “Build it in Britain shipbuilding”, followed by a debate on blue light emergency services. Both debates will arise on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 12 JULY—Debate on a motion on the practice of forced adoption in the UK, followed by general debate on lessons from the collapse of Carillion. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 13 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 16 July will include:

MONDAY 16 JULY—Remaining stages of the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill.

TUESDAY 17 JULY—Remaining stages of the Trade Bill.

WEDNESDAY 18 JULY—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Domestic Gas and Electricity (Tariff Cap) Bill, followed by Opposition day (15th allotted half day, part 2). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 19 JULY—Debate on a motion on the independent complaints and grievance policy, followed by business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 20 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 23 July will include:

MONDAY 23 JULY—General debate, subject to be announced.

TUESDAY 24 JULY—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

I am delighted to wish the NHS a very happy 70th birthday. We are building an NHS for the future, ensuring it will be there for all of our children and grandchildren, just as it has been there for us. Today, we thank all the nurses and doctors, and all of our hard-working NHS staff for the extraordinary work they do, helping more people to live longer, healthier lives.

I am sure that everyone will want to join me in sending our best wishes to all who are taking part in the Pride celebrations in London this weekend.

Although I am a bit suspicious that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) may be practising his Swedish, I am hopeful that the whole House will join me in wishing England the very best of luck in their quarter final against Sweden on Saturday.

Finally, I am immensely proud that in my own constituency this weekend is the world-famous British grand prix at Silverstone. I wish all the teams and drivers the very best.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business, which I think takes us up to the recess, and for the two Opposition days. I suppose it is too cheeky and too early to ask for the Easter recess dates, but perhaps the Leader of the House could say when the next Queen's Speech will be.

Given that Defence Question Time was moved, without the courtesy of letting business managers know, from its slot after the NATO summit and the publication of the modernising defence programme reports, may we have a debate on the summit and the reports? Or should we ring the Secretary of State for Defence so that he can ask Siri?

We now have a third option for the post-Brexit arrangement, although there was no clue in the Prime Minister's statement on Monday as to what it is and how it will work. It will be an interesting house party tomorrow—I assume the Leader of the House will also be there—and they may end up playing Cluedo. It will be a Cabinet Minister, in the dining room, with the White Paper. [*Interruption.*] Those who have played it will know. Presumably, one side will take Sharpies to redact it and the other side will take highlighters to accept the good parts.

Yet again, the House is the last to know about the business. On Monday, a journalist tweeted about the publication of the White Paper, saying that

“it looks like the White Paper has been pencilled in for July 12th, the very day that Donald Trump arrives in the UK.”

Again, the courtesies to the House are not being followed. None of the Opposition business managers knew when the White Paper was going to be published. Will the Leader of the House confirm when it will be published and may we have a statement on it? Might I suggest the 23 July, when it seems there is a spare slot for a general debate? It would be possible to debate the White Paper then.

It is not clear how this third way will affect the Irish border and what will happen in respect of alignment. The Prime Minister is yet to visit the border; perhaps the away-day party could go there en masse. I met a farmer at the farmers market in Parliament last week, and he told me that his farm straddles the north and the Republic; what will happen to him? The Prime Minister said on Monday:

“In a no-deal situation, it will of course be up to the United Kingdom to determine what it does in relation to the border in Northern Ireland.”—[*Official Report*, 2 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 59.]

That is not correct: there is more than one party on either side of the border and more than one party in the negotiations.

The Leader of the House congratulated the NHS on its 70th anniversary, and we do, too. It was the courage of Nye Bevan and the determination of a Labour Government that saw the birth of the NHS, which has completely transformed social justice in this country.

Why did the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care not come to the House to give a list of the 17 operations that are to be cancelled? I am sure that Members have read that list. I have had carpal tunnel syndrome—what would have happened to me? Would I not have been allowed to have that operation? Would I have had to ask for it? The Secretary of State is hiding behind the head of NHS England. May we have a statement from him on another step to privatisation and to explain the reasons why those 17 operations are on that list? Perhaps he could extend the consultation period over the summer.

While the Conservatives are dining at the Hurlingham Club, the country is falling apart on their watch. I am not going to go over the urgent question on universal credit, but suffice it to say that, as the National Audit Office said, the Government's flagship universal credit programme has not delivered value for money, and it is impossible to know whether it will help to get people off benefits and into work. We need a proper debate so that we can find out who said what to whom and who understood what about the report. We need that debate, so may we have it as soon as possible?

What about a debate on the Public Accounts Committee report that said:

“After seven years of government funding reductions totalling nearly 50% and rising demand for services, local authorities are under real strain. Key services that support vulnerable people, such as social care and housing, are now under enormous pressure.”

Funding cuts have reduced public services such as libraries, waste collection and bus services. Our high streets are dying. Marks & Spencer and Poundworld are leaving Walsall town centre. High street names are either closing stores, or they are in administration.

What about students? Again, I raise the plight of our poor students. The House of Commons Library provided my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) with some analysis that showed that the Government are causing more debt to students because of their use of the retail price index to apply interest to their student loans. Switching to CPI would result in £16,000 less interest being added over 30 years. We need a statement on what the Government will do to alleviate this debt.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) told me that there will be a memorial event in the Piper Alpha memorial garden in Hazelhead park on Friday evening. It is the 30th anniversary of the Piper Alpha explosion. The names of the 167 people who died in that explosion will be read out. Frank Doran, the former Labour MP for Aberdeen North, was assiduous in fighting for improved safety standards in the North sea.

I want to thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing the Library to use Speaker's House last Monday. There was a fantastic celebration of 200 years of the Library, and fantastic memorabilia were on display. I thank Penny Young and all her staff for the fabulous work that they put in there. I also thank other Members of the House: EqualiTeas has recorded 107,000 people taking part and 3,000 tea parties—that is an average of 4.5 tea

[Valerie Vaz]

parties per constituency. The pack was brilliant. David Clark, the head of education and engagement, and his team of Michelle, Rob, Beryl, Emma and Charles should be congratulated. It is an excellent and inspiring way to engage the public in celebrating Parliament and equality.

Andrea Leadsom: I start by absolutely agreeing with the hon. Lady that the EqualTeas effort has been fantastic. We are all thoroughly enjoying it. I very much enjoyed cutting the first cake, which had this wonderful teapot on the top. It is wonderful to think of those very smartly dressed ladies 100 years ago primly having tea, but plotting on how to get the vote. It shows what can be done when we really try.

I also join the hon. Lady in commemorating the awful Piper Alpha disaster. It is right that we should remember it. I remember going on to a North sea oil rig when I was Energy Minister and realising how very vulnerable I was, so I absolutely join with her in that commemoration. She asked about future dates, and, of course, I will bring them forward as soon as I can. She also asked about defence questions being moved with Home Office questions. I sincerely apologise if she felt that there was any attempt to mislead in any way. The new oral questions rota was issued more than a fortnight ago, which I do consider is sufficient time for hon. Members to familiarise themselves with it. It was felt to be important that Defence Ministers were able to attend the opening day of the Farnborough air show, which is a very important day in the calendar for the Defence Department.

The hon. Lady asked about the Cabinet away-day. I can tell her that I am very much looking forward to it. I do not think there will be time for Cluedo, but I expect that there will be some very interesting discussions. The White Paper she mentioned will, of course, be brought forward just as soon as it can be. The Prime Minister has said before the summer recess; that is not too long to go. The hon. Lady asked about the Irish border. I also do not think that we will have time to go to the Irish border during the course of the day tomorrow. It was a good suggestion, but, possibly, without our broomsticks we might struggle to get there in time. None the less, she raises very important points about Northern Ireland and the Republic. It is vital that we keep to our red line of not allowing a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic and that remains absolutely the Government's position.

The hon. Lady asked about universal credit. As she knows, we have just had an urgent question on that topic, so I do not propose to spend a lot of time on it other than to say that universal credit is intended to be a much simpler and more effective benefit. It does work for people. The Leader of the Opposition likes to use examples, so let me say that Nayim from Lancashire has said, "Universal credit gave me the flexibility to take on additional hours without the stress of thinking that this might stop my benefit straight away." Roberta from Yorkshire, who had mental health issues, is now in work and loving it, and says, "My work coach helped turn my life around. He tailored his support to my situation and thanks to him I have found my dream job." Real people's lives are being improved by universal credit, and that is absolutely the point of it.

The hon. Lady said that local authorities are under strain. She will appreciate that this Government have sought since 2010 to get to a point where our economy is again living within its means and is succeeding. Just last week, BAE Systems won a £20 billion contract to build nine top warships for Australia. A business survey shows that we remain the No. 1 destination for foreign direct investment in Europe. Tech businesses attracted nearly \$8 billion of funding last year—double the amount received in 2016. Employment is up to another record high, real wages are growing and the OECD is upgrading our growth forecast. What further evidence does the hon. Lady need to see that it is this Government who are taking the steps necessary to turn around our economy, and ensure that we can survive and thrive?

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the inequalities of the provision of personal independence payments for blind people? There seems to be a disparity in the age at which the payments can be made.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is mentioning an important and serious question, and mentions disparities about the age at which payments can be made to blind people. I assure him that new claims for PIP are available for claimants aged between 16 and 64, regardless of their health condition or disability. Where a claimant is in receipt of PIP, they can continue to receive it after the age of 65, providing that they continue to meet the eligibility criteria.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week, and join in with the 70th birthday wishes to our amazing national health service. I am particularly proud that in Scotland we have the best performing NHS in the whole United Kingdom. I also note what the shadow Leader of the House said about the Piper Alpha disaster 30 years ago today; it is an event that we should remember.

To the Leader of the House, "Heja Sverige!" We were brought up in the '60s and '70s in Scotland at the height of Jimmy Hill-ism, and it is really hard to love the English football team because of that particular experience.

I do not know whether the Leader of the House is down as an "accept" at the Chequers get-together tomorrow, but I have a sneaking suspicion about which side she is on in this great Cabinet battle of Brexit. It is now open warfare, with the Brexiteers lining up to rubbish the latest delusional proposal. I am just wondering whether the House will get the opportunity to debate this fantastical "third way" solution that the Prime Minister is promoting before the EU27 once again reject it out of hand.

Surely it is now time for electronic voting. I understand that some of my Conservative friends got just a wee bit upset on Tuesday evening about having to vote on our estimates process. Apparently, just doing their job got in the way of being able to cheer on the English national football team. Apparently it was all the fault of us nasty Scots Nats for daring to vote in a parliamentary democracy. How dare we? Well, salvation is on its way and there is a solution available for my footy-fixated Tory friends: stop wandering round and round aimlessly for 20 minutes in a headcount in stuffed Division Lobbies, introduce some modern voting facilities and come into the 21st century.

That would save England having to be eliminated on penalties so that Conservative Members can continue to do their business in this Parliament.

Lastly, this Tory dark money scandal is simply not going away. We now know the address of the murky Scottish Unionist Association Trust and we know its trustees, but we still do not know how it got its money, where that money was invested and why it was not properly registered with the Electoral Commission. It stinks to high heaven and the Scottish Tories are going to have to come clean some time very soon.

Andrea Leadsom: I can absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman that the side that I am on—at Chequers or anywhere—is the side of the United Kingdom. May I gently ask the hon. Gentleman whose side he is on? That is the question that he and his colleagues need to answer.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's question about electronic voting, I would observe that Scottish National party Members certainly should not be playing in the World cup due to the slowness of the 33 of them going through the Lobby—they showed no ability to sprint. It is entirely in order for them to vote at all times, as was pointed out on the day. Nevertheless, the Serjeant at Arms having to go twice into the Lobby to find out what was causing such a delay in the 33 of them staggering through prevented not only those in the Chamber who wanted to watch the football from doing so, but the Doorkeepers and the many other staff who support us. It was just plain mean to do that.

In response to the hon. Gentleman's point about donations, I can tell him that the Scottish Conservative party has recorded all donations in line with the law.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The current legal framework on referendums was based on two reports—the Nairn commission report on the conduct of referendums in 1996 and the report by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in 1998. The rules on referendums have not been updated for 20 years. Will the Leader of the House consider giving us a debate on the rules on referendums, particularly in the light of the fact that on Monday the report of the Independent Commission on Referendums, which I have been pleased to play a part in, is coming out? It was put together by the UCL constitution unit under the leadership of Meg Russell. We will have an opportunity to look at some of the suggestions on updating the rules on referendums, particularly with regard to social media and all the reports of people interfering with the process. I hope that she will take this request seriously and that we can have a detailed debate on the potential new rules that we could have surrounding this important part of our democracy.

Andrea Leadsom: I thank my right hon. Friend for her contribution to that debate. I certainly look forward to seeing the report. She may wish to raise her specific issue at Electoral Commission questions next Thursday.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business right up until the recess on 24 July. I can let the House know that we have already pre-determined that on 19 July the business nominated by the Backbench Business Committee will

be the first anniversary of the tobacco control plan and smoking policy. I suspect that our determination of the business for 24 July will come this Tuesday. I hope that the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) will be happy with the outcome of that.

Yesterday in Prime Minister's questions, my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) invited the Prime Minister to Newcastle for the great exhibition of the north. Of course, that is in both Newcastle and Gateshead, so I would like to extend that invitation to all Members to visit Newcastle and Gateshead for the great exhibition of the north. On the Gateshead side of the river, they can visit the Baltic Centre, the Sage Gateshead and the By the River Brew Co., all of which can be accessed via the Gateshead Millennium bridge—so welcome to Gateshead as well.

Andrea Leadsom: As ever, we all love to celebrate the great exhibition of the north and seize the opportunities to visit when we can. I am certainly looking into whether I could possibly get there; I would very much like to do so.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): My constituents are currently being denied their legal rights to inspect the accounts of their local authority. Taunton Deane Borough Council's spending data is currently a whole year out of date. My constituents have only a 30-day period in which to inspect the accounts. The council has blamed—believe it or not—a computer error. I am afraid that this is outrageous. The chief executive and the leader are wholly responsible, but the Government do have a duty on this. May we please have a debate in Government time on the ability of local councils to fulfil their statutory obligations to my constituents and many others?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises a very important and detailed point. I recommend that he raise it directly with Ministers or at Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government questions on 23 July.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): The national lottery is not fit for purpose. How can it be right that, in the same year, Ashfield gets £900,000, while a city constituency a few miles down the road gets £64 million? May we have a debate in Government time on how to ensure that our former coalfield communities get their fair share from the lottery?

Andrea Leadsom: I would like to pay tribute to all those who buy lottery tickets and to the amazing achievements of the lottery in supporting good causes around the country. The hon. Lady makes an important point, and I suggest she seek an Adjournment debate, so that she can raise that matter.

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Sylvia Plath, speaking of her beloved son, said:

“There is no guile or warp in him. May he keep so.”

In our time, our children are being warped by online gambling. The Gambling Commission reports that 25,000 children in Britain are problem gamblers and that a number of online gambling vehicles are predatory, using techniques to make children spend. Will the Leader of

[Mr John Hayes]

the House arrange for a Minister to make a statement or perhaps even hold a debate, to ensure that we take seriously this great menace? Graham Greene said:

“There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.”

We can condemn our children to a future that is bitter and bleak, or we can craft a future that is joyful, hopeful and wonderful.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman’s book learning is legendary, as is his willingness generously to share it with us.

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this appalling situation. I have seen myself with my own kids that when young children are playing a game, they are encouraged not to use actual money, because they do not have any, but to get addicted to the idea of buying some extra beads or something else to enable them to play that game even better. I have experience of that, and I share his grave concern. He will be aware that Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Ministers are determined to keep children safe online and are doing all they can to tackle the issue. He may wish to seek a Backbench Business debate to look at what more can be done to protect young children.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): In the southern part of Syria at this moment, over a quarter of a million civilians are being bombed and attacked by Russia’s air force and the Assad regime. Is it not time we had another debate in this House on the crimes that are going on in Syria and the failure of the international community, including this country, to do anything about it?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is quite right that this is an ongoing catastrophe. The conflict is now in its eighth year, and the UN estimates that more than 400,000 people have been killed and over half the population has been displaced. He is right to raise that, and he may well wish to take it up with Defence Ministers on Monday during oral questions. The UK can be very proud that we are the second largest bilateral donor to the humanitarian response in Syria. We have now committed more than £2.7 billion to the Syria crisis since 2012, which is our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): On pages 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 of today’s Order Paper, there are more than 60 private Members’ Bills listed for Friday from 20 right hon. and hon. Members. The vast majority of those Bills will be objected to by a senior Whip on Friday. Can we have, for transparency’s sake, a statement tomorrow morning listing all the Bills that the senior Whip will object to on Friday, so that the House knows which ones to concentrate on?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend will know that the Government have always maintained the view that private Members’ Bills serve a very important function. They are an invaluable opportunity for Members to promote legislation on the causes they support. The Government

have been keen to support a number of private Members’ Bills—I will not go into them now—and there are some excellent ones coming forward. I can also tell him that the number of private Members’ Bills passed under the Government in the 2010 Parliament was 31, versus only 22 in the 2005 Parliament. This Government have a very good record of supporting and enabling Back-Bench business to get on to the statute book.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I think that it is widely recognised across the House that, in the past few months, there has been a rise in violent crime, particularly in London. The police are stretched to the limit and are using reserve powers repeatedly, particularly in my constituency, where section 60 powers have been used a lot. I know that we recently had a debate on crime, but the Security Minister really needs to come to the House to make a statement on the situation that London is now in.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise the issue of serious violence. It is a grave concern, particularly, as he points out, in urban areas. Our serious violence strategy is focused on steering young people away from crime and putting in place measures to tackle the root causes. He will be aware that, with our Offensive Weapons Bill, we are seeking to make it much harder for people to gain access to the dangerous weapons that fuel the problem with violence we are experiencing at the moment.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): May we have a statement early next week from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government arising from his statement to the Local Government Association conference this week, where he said he had “no intention of forcing reorganisation on local government where it isn’t wanted or needed”?

As you know, Mr Speaker, reorganisation is neither wanted nor needed in Christchurch, where 17,676 people voted against it in a local referendum. If the Secretary of State came to the House to make a statement, it would give him an opportunity to withdraw the opposition he continues to make in the High Court to Christchurch’s case against the Government. If the Government now withdraw their opposition to Christchurch, we could all live happily.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this constituency issue again. He will be aware that Housing, Communities and Local Government questions will take place on Monday 23 July, and that is obviously a question that is best directed straight to the Secretary of State.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Mr Speaker, some years ago, you and I visited southern Sudan. When the country of South Sudan obtained independence, we hoped it would have a better future. Sadly, a crisis of biblical proportions is going on there, with famine, warfare and everything else. Will the Leader of the House call an urgent debate on South Sudan, so that we can raise the implications of the latest failure of the peace talks, with all its repercussions?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman refers to another humanitarian crisis in a part of the world that the UK is strongly seeking to support and in which the UK is

endeavouring to find peaceful ways forward. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can discuss progress directly with a Foreign Office Minister.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I am delighted to inform the House that Erewash has topped the *Which?* magazine food hygiene survey, with 97% of medium and high-risk food retailers now compliant. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a significant achievement both for the food inspection and enforcement team at Erewash Borough Council and for local food retailers in my constituency? Will she consider holding a debate in Government time to highlight the important contribution that the food sector makes to our high streets?

Andrea Leadsom: I am very pleased to congratulate Erewash on this achievement. It is fantastic for my hon. Friend's local council, but also for local food retailers. She is right to point out that local authorities across the UK are responsible for regulating food businesses to make sure that the food we eat is safe. She is also right that the sector makes a huge contribution to our high streets, and I encourage her to apply for a Westminster Hall debate or an Adjournment debate to raise further the contribution it makes.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): May we have a debate on ministerial accountability? Many of my constituents who claim universal credit or other benefits but innocently get it wrong are sanctioned. Why do they think there is one rule for the Minister responsible for this and another rule for them?

Andrea Leadsom: I again say that universal credit is designed to be a better, much simpler benefit that enables more people to get into work. The Department for Work and Pensions has sought to listen to all the views expressed on both sides of the House over many months and to ensure wherever we can that we improve the service to claimants to make the experience for them much better. We will continue to listen to the experience and feedback and to improve the system so that it helps more people to get back into work.

Mrs Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con): Headteachers in my constituency and representatives from Anglia Ruskin University have raised multiple concerns about unconditional offers being given to students, irrespective of their A-level results. They believe that such offers manipulate student choices and leave students ill-equipped to cope with rigorous undergraduate programmes. May we have a Back-Bench debate to explore that issue further?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an important and serious issue, and the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation has been clear about the need for rigorous standards. Universities and the entire higher education sector should do all they can to encourage a diverse range of people to access the higher education system, and my hon. Friend might wish to raise her specific point through an Adjournment debate.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): The welcome Gilligan report on cycling came out this week and included recommendations for major investment in Oxford. May we please have a debate on that important issue?

Andrea Leadsom: I know how important cycling infrastructure is to the hon. Lady's constituency, and the Government welcome Andrew Gilligan's report for the National Infrastructure Commission on that subject. We want cycling and walking to become the natural choice of transport for people of all ages and backgrounds, particularly in urban areas, and we are determined to make it safer and easier. I would recommend that the hon. Lady apply for an Adjournment debate, but I understand she has already done so.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The whole country has rightly been celebrating three Tottenham players putting four penalties past an Arsenal goalkeeper this week. May I draw the House's attention to the fact that the European Parliament is today debating the EU copyright directive, which will have incredible implications for internet users and also protect artists' copyright? Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate in the House on that issue, which is of the utmost importance to our future?

Andrea Leadsom: Would you like to confirm your delight at the performance of those Spurs players, Mr Speaker? Not sure. On my hon. Friend's substantive question, that is indeed an important topic, and having heard from the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, I suspect there will be the opportunity to raise such a matter for debate in the pre-recess Adjournment debate.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): On 10 May, I asked the Leader of the House, on behalf of my constituent, Heather Cameron, for a debate on pensions. Heather Cameron is in the Gallery today, so may I ask the right hon. Lady whether there will be time before the summer recess for a binding vote to secure justice for those women born in the 1950s who have been robbed of their state pensions?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that I have just read out the business up to the summer recess. There will be opportunities for Adjournment debates and Westminster Hall debates in the usual way, and I encourage him to seek such a debate. I also encourage him to bear in mind that the Government have already sought to minimise the impact of these measures on the personal pensions of women born during the 1950s.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): May we have a debate on the NHS? As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the NHS, Moray has received a bitter blow. NHS Grampian has said that maternity services at Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin will be downgraded for up to 18 months, so hundreds of pregnant women will have to travel to Aberdeen or Inverness to give birth, rather than do so locally in Moray. Does my right hon. Friend agree with local campaigns, such as the Keep MUM campaign, which says that the proposals raise grave concerns about the safety of pregnant women, babies and sick children?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is right, of course, to raise the importance of having local, good-quality care for pregnant mums, and the opportunity for women to deliver their babies safely and close to home is key.

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his determination to campaign for such things in his constituency, and I wish him and the Keep MUM campaign every success.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): This week marks the 40th anniversary of when my secretary, Linda Spencer, first came to work at the House of Commons. I would like to thank Linda for all her hard work on my behalf and that of former colleagues, Gisela Stuart and the late John Fraser. Does the Leader of the House think she might find time for a short debate in which we can pay tribute to the hard work of all the staff—cleaners, catering staff, secretaries, researchers, admin workers, doormen and women, *Hansard* reporters, Clerks, librarians, maintenance workers, and police and security staff—because without their hard work, we could not possibly carry out our duties on behalf of our constituents?

Mr Speaker: Order. I just say to the hon. Gentleman that I am very much aware of this matter and that a letter from me will be winging its way to Linda Spencer today.

Andrea Leadsom: I join you, Mr Speaker, in paying tribute to her for her many long years of service. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise the fact that all the support staff right across the Palace of Westminster enable us to do our work and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude. I encourage him to make his points more fully in the pre-recess Adjournment debate.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Last weekend, I attended an excellent EqualiTeas event organised by Bramhall and Woodford guides. I discovered that across my constituency hundreds of children are waiting to go into guides and scouts, but that a lack of volunteers is preventing them from doing so. Will my right hon. Friend join me, as a former beaver leader, in recognising the importance of the valuable work scouting and guiding volunteers do? Perhaps there could be a debate on this.

Andrea Leadsom: Yes. My hon. Friend raises the absolutely vital work of volunteers in all sorts of youth groups—beavers is just one of them. There is no doubt that across all our communities volunteering enables young people to have different opportunities and experiences, and that is very much appreciated. I certainly encourage my hon. Friend to seek an Adjournment debate, so she can pay her own tribute to them.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The drug death figures for Scotland have just come out and they are absolutely shocking: they have increased since the 2016 figures. Will the Government arrange for a debate in Government time on their failing drug strategy, which is not supporting my constituents or people in Scotland?

Andrea Leadsom: I am incredibly sorry to hear about the drug statistics. I am not aware of them, but the hon. Lady might like to raise this matter directly with the Secretary of State for Scotland at Scotland questions next week. I can certainly assure her that the Government

are very conscious of the need to get rid of the scourge of illegal drug-taking and the massive damage it causes to people's lives.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Mr Speaker, I know you have been a great supporter of Guide Dogs. Many right hon. and hon. Members will have seen its stand just off the Committee Corridor recently. Its big campaign is to try to make kerb parking illegal, as it is and has been in London since 1974. I know the roads Minister is looking at this issue, but perhaps a debate in Government time might persuade the Minister that it is about time those powers were extended outside London.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is right that there was a fantastic exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall. He is absolutely right that the big problem of pavement parking causes real challenges for people with visual impairments. I certainly encourage him, if he did not already raise this at Transport questions today, to raise it directly with Ministers, perhaps through an Adjournment debate.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On 5 June, *The Yorkshire Post* and other great northern newspapers wrote to the Prime Minister about their "One North" campaign in relation to the rail timetable shambles and their request for Transport for the North to get additional powers over transport in the north. It is now a month on and they have not had a response from the Prime Minister, so I wondered if the Leader could do her best to get a response to those newspapers.

Andrea Leadsom: If the hon. Lady wants to write to me, I can find out what has happened to the response she is looking for. She will be aware, though, that it was this Government who created the great north rail project, which intends to provide investment of well over £1 billion by 2020 to provide space for more than 40,000 more passengers. It is designed to provide big improvements for rail passengers in the north.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Fly-tipping is no longer a minor nuisance in Beckenham, and it is reaching almost endemic proportions in some places. The cost of dealing with even just one instance of it can run into thousands of pounds, not including checking it for hazardous waste and then trying to get evidence for prosecutions. Can we have a debate on the current level of financial support offered by the Treasury to local authorities to address the scourge of fly-tipping?

Andrea Leadsom: There is no doubt that the problem of fly-tipping has increased. My hon. Friend will be aware that as a Government, we are intending to reduce fly-tipping through better prevention, detection and risk-based enforcement. The National Fly-tipping Prevention Group promotes good practice and we are cracking down on offenders by strengthening the Sentencing Council's guideline for environmental offences. We are also giving stronger powers for suspected fly-tippers' vehicles to be seized and destroyed. There is no doubt that there is more to do but it is a priority for the Government, and he might like to seek an Adjournment debate to discuss it further.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On this, the 70th anniversary of the NHS, colleagues might be surprised to hear of the £3.5 billion cost that alcohol causes to the NHS every year. That is enough to pay for the salaries

of some 58,000 hospital doctors or more than 117,000 hospital nurses. With this in mind, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate in Government time, as this is important to every party in the House, on the harms and the cost of alcohol not only to health, but to our whole nation, as well as on the solutions we can use to address this problem?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important matter. The Government fully recognise the devastating impact that alcohol misuse can have on individuals and their families, as well as the costs to our health service, which in Northern Ireland, are up to £900 million each year. We are developing a new cross-Government strategy for alcohol, which, among a number of measures, will invest £6 million over three years to support vulnerable children living with alcohol-dependent parents. However, he is absolutely right: as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NHS, we have to consider the big challenges that it continues to face, such as tackling the damage of alcoholism.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Can we have an urgent debate on providing relief to communities whose lives and homes are being ruined by inappropriately routed traffic? The residents of Hockliffe have put up with days of really unacceptable disturbance. They want the A5 going through the village detrunked and a heavy goods vehicle ban, and this is entirely achievable as an acceptable alternative route exists.

Andrea Leadsom: I am sorry to hear about my hon. Friend's problems with his A5. I have similar problems with an A5 in my constituency, and I am sure that all hon. Members suffer considerable problems with particular roads. The Government are investing £15 billion in the strategic road network between 2015 and 2021 to improve its performance for users and those who are affected by it, such as, as he points out, the residents of Hockliffe. If he was not able to raise this in Transport questions earlier, I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate, or if he wants to write to me, I can take up his particular question with the Department for Transport.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): Many of my constituents worked at the Hoover factory in Merthyr Tydfil until it closed, except for distribution, in 2009, and they paid into what was a highly regarded pension fund. Despite the fund showing huge surpluses in past years, which paid into Her Majesty's Treasury and the company, the pension pot is now in deficit and is being transferred to the Pension Protection Fund. Many of those who contributed the most risk having a 10% cut to their pension. With other companies taking this option, can we have a debate to consider the fairness of companies transferring their liabilities and pensioners losing out?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. Clearly, we have seen examples right across the country of companies that have effectively removed assets from their pension funds—it is completely unacceptable. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), would be happy to meet him to discuss this particular issue, or indeed, he could seek an Adjournment debate to discuss it directly with Ministers.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): New rolling stock—refurbished class 170s—are starting to appear on the Harrogate and Knaresborough line. I have had much positive feedback from constituents on this, and they can see the end in sight for Pacers. These trains are a significant upgrade. On top of that, we will see the first newly built stock arriving into the franchise from the manufacturer this month, so can we have a statement from the transport team on the progress that is being made on bringing new rolling stock into the railways of Yorkshire?

Andrea Leadsom: I am really pleased to hear that my hon. Friend's constituents have seen the improved quality that the class 170 trains are beginning to provide for passengers. Production of the new trains is well under way, with 14 trains already built. As he knows, this is part of a major programme, and both Northern and TransPennine will have bigger train fleets, all of which will be either brand new or fully refurbished. And, as he points out, this will mean the end of the unpopular Pacer trains.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Loraine Farren from the Red Box Project and Sarah Watkinson from Mirfield Winter Warmers are doing tremendous work in my constituency collecting and distributing menstrual products for girls in schools and young women who cannot afford to buy them for themselves. I am pleased to say that my office will be a collection point for anyone who wishes to drop off such products, and I hope that other MPs will be able to do the same at their constituency offices. May we have a further debate on period poverty?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises a really important issue, and I am pleased to tell the House that I was at a Youth Democracy Week event only this week where a young man raised exactly the same point. He asked why, when young men are being offered free condoms, young women cannot be offered free sanitary protection. I told him I completely agreed with him, and said that this would be exactly the sort of campaign that young people such as himself could use to raise the profile of this issue. The hon. Lady is also absolutely right to raise this, and I would be delighted to see her seek an Adjournment debate or indeed a Backbench Business debate so that this subject can be discussed more fully.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): May we please have a debate on what is being done to support our high streets? They represent an important part of our towns, and it would be useful to have a debate on this matter.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend might have seen the Grimsey report, which promotes the idea of local leadership on the high street. He is right to say that high streets are vital to thriving communities, and as people change the way in which they shop, it is important that we do more at local level to ensure that we keep the heart of our communities going.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am keen to accommodate remaining colleagues, but there should be a contract between us. Under the terms of the contract, colleagues should

[Mr Speaker]

undertake to ask a question that does not exceed a sentence. If they do that, I will be able to get everybody in.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): What a test, Mr Speaker! May we have a statement on the inadequacy of personal independence payment assessments for people with acquired brain injury? My constituent has contacted me to say that his nerves are shattered and that he is now on anti-depressants because, although his neurology report has clearly stated that he will never work again due to the severity and impact of his brain injury, he has been assessed as ineligible for this benefit.

Andrea Leadsom: I am truly sorry to hear about the hon. Lady's constituent's case. I encourage her to take it up directly with Ministers, or if she wants to write to me, I will do that for her.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Hot, dry weather is normally something to be celebrated, but it has led to, and sustained, a huge fire on Winter Hill overlooking my constituency. I pay tribute to the contribution of the fire brigade in controlling the fire, but may we have a debate on the contribution of the voluntary sector, and especially the Bolton mountain rescue team, in dealing with this crisis?

Andrea Leadsom: I think all hon. Members will want to join my hon. Friend in praising the efforts of the firefighters and the military who are really working hard to try to get these fires under control. I am sure he will want to seek an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate on this, so that there can be further discussion of the problems and the potential criminality that is causing the fires in the first place.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): A recent report found that 40% of the Government's top 100 suppliers failed to meet the basic legal requirements of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. May we have a debate on modern slavery in supply chains, and on what progress the Government are making on ending extreme labour exploitation here and overseas?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is right to raise the issue of modern slavery. I am sure she will recognise that this Government have done a huge amount to try to tackle this scourge with the first ever Modern Slavery Act. She is right to raise the problem of continued slavery within the supply chain. We have Home Office questions on Monday 16 July, and she might want to seek a further update on progress at those oral questions.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Our all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking reports next week on dispute resolution, so that businesses that have been mistreated by their banks will be able to find justice for the first time. Bearing in mind that the kick-off for our event is 7 o'clock next Wednesday, would my right hon. Friend be willing to offer some Government time to enable these matters to be properly debated?

Andrea Leadsom: I first pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his assiduous efforts to ensure better banking that is fair to consumers and businesses—he has really fought hard on this topic—and I would certainly support the idea of a debate in this place. He might want to seek a Back-Bench debate, given that the issue is of great interest right across the House and that many Members have constituency cases of their own.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): May we have a debate in Government time about how long it takes Ministers to respond to letters? I wrote to the Home Office about my Easterhouse constituent, Mr Kasharfeh, eight months ago, and I have only just had a holding reply. Does the Leader of the House think that is really good enough?

Andrea Leadsom: I am sorry to hear about that delay. I am sure there is a reason for it. As he will know, there are standard turnaround times for Departments to respond to correspondence, but occasionally letters do go astray. We have Home Office questions on 16 July, but if he wants to write to me, I can chase it up for him.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Could the Leader of the House look at the policy of flying the England flag on match days? It is obviously fantastic news that the England men's football team have been so successful, but on Sunday the England women's cricket team defeated New Zealand in the final of the three nations series—Australia, New Zealand and England—and they go into the world cup this winter as the hot favourites. Please can we fly the flag for women and men equally?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend should be reassured to know that the Prime Minister made clear her determination to fly the England flag for England's women as much as England's men, and indeed for all nations of the United Kingdom. We support our sporting teams. It is a great pleasure that we all come together to share the enjoyment of our national sporting teams.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): After suffering domestic abuse and with the support of the police, my constituent was able to leave the home she shared with her partner, but the bank refused to allow her to take her name off the mortgage without his permission. Of course, he would not give permission and he blocked the sale of the house. After five years of her not paying the mortgage, the bank repossessed and sold below the market rate, leaving her with a £35,000 debt. Can we have a statement outlining what help can be given to my constituent and what can be done to make banks fulfil their moral duty as well as their legal duty?

Andrea Leadsom: I have a vague recollection that the hon. Gentleman has raised exactly this point before about dual signatures—

Alan Brown indicated dissent.

Andrea Leadsom: No? Well, certainly another Member has. I am extremely sympathetic to the need to ensure that co-signatories in an abusive relationship can separate. It is unacceptable otherwise. If he wants to write to me with the details of the case, I can forward them to the Department for a substantive reply.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): As the Leader of the House will know, small and medium-sized

businesses are the lifeblood of my local economy. What opportunities will there be in the near future to discuss the opportunities they will have in a post-Brexit Britain?

Andrea Leadsom: I hope my hon. Friend will recognise that we have had one or two debates on the UK's prospects as we seek to leave the EU; there will be many more opportunities, but I just remind all hon. Members that we had 37 days of debate on the withdrawal Bill and five Westminster Hall debates in the last month on Brexit and the opportunities arising from it. He is absolutely right, though, that we need to consider the opportunities and not just the negotiations. There are significant chances, particularly given that many UK companies do not do business with the EU but still have to abide by regulations that for many small and medium-sized enterprises can really hamper progress. I am very optimistic about their future, and I am sure he will find plenty of chances in the coming weeks to put forward his views on the opportunities that will arise.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Refugee families with young children settled in schools in Cardiff Central are being moved hundreds of miles around the country with just a few days' notice because of a shortage of outsourced Home Office accommodation, which undoes all the good work that teachers and teaching assistants do to help these most vulnerable of children. Please can we have a statement from the Home Secretary about the expensive, shoddy and dysfunctional Home Office accommodation contracts?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will be aware that this country has been incredibly generous and very careful in the way that it treats refugees who come to this country to seek asylum and to escape from appalling experiences overseas. However, she may wish to raise her specific concerns during Home Office questions, which will take place on 16 July.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): On Tuesday a member of staff at the Countess of Chester hospital was arrested following the investigation of a number of unexplained deaths in the neonatal unit. Anyone who has attended baby loss debates in the House will know that it is impossible to overestimate how traumatic the loss of a newborn is, which is why I was so disgusted to hear of the doorstepping of my constituents by members of the press following the news. May we please have a debate on how we can stop this disgusting, immoral practice?

Andrea Leadsom: We have all been horrified to hear about the problem of unexplained deaths in that hospital, and I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's disgust at the

doorstepping of people who have suffered the appalling loss of a baby. It is utterly unacceptable. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to take this up directly with Ministers, or perhaps to seek a Westminster Hall debate in order to discuss the issue of intrusion in such very sensitive cases.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): After 17 months of dithering, delays and doubts, the UK Government have still not made a full commitment to the Tay cities deal. They have not said how much they will provide and when they will provide it. The people of Dundee have a right to know, and they need to know now. May we have an urgent statement, most properly from the Treasury but perhaps from the Secretary of State for Scotland, about the progress of the deal and when it will finally be delivered?

Andrea Leadsom: As the hon. Gentleman will know, Scotland questions will take place next Wednesday, and I am sure that Ministers will be able to give him the answer then. However, I am also sure he will be delighted that four city region deals have already been arranged in Glasgow, Inverness and the Highlands, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh and south-east Scotland. So progress is being made, and the Government have shown their commitment to providing greater devolution so that local communities can make their own progress in the way that is most appropriate for them.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): This week *The Guardian* revealed that the Government are spending some of the £1.3 billion aid budget of the conflict, stability and security fund on promoting austerity with Saatchi and Saatchi in Tunisia. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact has said that the fund is badly managed, and the International Development Committee has asked for an immediate review of it. When will the Secretary of State for International Development come to the House and make a statement about how that review will take place?

Andrea Leadsom: I am afraid I am not aware of the report that the hon. Gentleman has cited. I suggest he take it up either by means of a written question or directly with International Development Ministers, so that he can be given an answer that is to his satisfaction.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. Points of order come after statements.

Construction Sector Deal

12.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): I note with respect, Mr Speaker, that you are wearing the same badge as I am, and I therefore hope you will join me in wishing the NHS a very happy birthday. That, of course, is also relevant to the construction sector deal, because the NHS is responsible for a large amount of construction.

With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement in response to the Government's publication of the sector deal for construction. Sector deals, in which 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 in partnership, 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 the nuclear sector deal was announced last week. We look forward to building on that in the months ahead.

In keeping with the ethos to which I have referred, today's deal represents a joint vision agreed by the Government and the construction sector which aims to transform the sector's productivity through innovative technologies and a more highly skilled workforce.

Construction underpins our economy and society. Few sectors have such an impact on communities across the UK, or have the same potential to provide large numbers of high-skilled, well-paid jobs. The construction sector, encompassing contracting, product manufacturing and professional services, had a turnover of about £370 billion in 2016, and employs 3.1 million people. Given its size and importance, the sector has a vital role to play in achieving the vision set out in our industrial strategy: strengthening the foundations of our economy, achieving the grand challenges of putting the UK at the forefront of the artificial intelligence and data revolution, maximising the advantages from the global shift to clean growth, becoming a world leader in the future of mobility, and meeting the needs of an ageing society.

We are in the early days of what is one of the greatest construction programmes in our history, from delivering more affordable and safer homes in places where people want to live, to major infrastructure projects such as Crossrail and the third runway at Heathrow. This infrastructure pipeline represents more than £600 billion over the next decade, including at least £44 billion for housing. The pace of that change, and its size, demands a construction sector that is the best in the world, and today's deal sets out to make that a reality.

First, the sector and the Government are making a joint £420 million investment to develop and commercialise digital design and offsite manufacturing technologies. We aim to reduce the cost of new buildings by a third, and to halve the time taken to deliver them. That will ensure that we get value for money from the Government's national infrastructure and construction pipeline. The current projections are for about £600 billion of public and private investment in infrastructure over the next 10 years, as well as a doubling of expenditure on economic infrastructure in the decade to 2022-23. The

investment will also support the Government's aspiration to deliver 1.5 million new homes by 2022.

Secondly, we will ensure that the construction sector is able to attract, train and retain the workforce that it needs both now and in the future, as it meets the demographic challenge of a workforce in which nearly a third of workers are over 50. That includes working with the Construction Industry Training Board to ensure that there is a strategic focus on future skills needs, and to increase significantly the number of approved apprenticeship standards. The sector will also aspire to increase the number of apprenticeship starts to 25,000 a year by 2020, and will work with professional institutions and the higher and further education sectors to ensure that all those training for or working in the industry are able to develop and increase their skills.

Finally, to ensure that the construction sector is home to more sustainable, profitable businesses, the standard business model needs to change to one that is based on strong integrated supply chains and higher levels of collaboration. Key to that is a boost in the sector's exporting capability, driven by our new investments in digital and manufacturing technologies to make the most of a market that is estimated to be worth £49 trillion between now and 2030. We will also ensure that construction firms have better access to the capital that the industry needs to invest and grow. That will include taking account of existing funding streams and the conclusions of the patient capital review, which aims to increase the availability of long-term finance to innovative firms.

History shows that the business community is best placed to identify what firms really need, and the Government will be there to support them. Sector deals rely on committed and visionary leadership. I therefore thank Andrew Wolstenholme, the sector deal champion, and the whole Construction Leadership Council, without whom this ambitious deal would not have been possible. After the statement I shall be visiting Battersea power station, where I will meet the leading members of the sector who have been so influential in bringing the deal to fruition.

The sector deal will drive economic growth, create well-paid, highly-skilled jobs in every part of the UK, and improve lives across the country. It represents a shared commitment to achieve those goals by establishing a strategic partnership between the Government and the sector, which we will seek to strengthen in the years ahead.

12.18 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I thank the Minister for early sight of the statement. It is welcome that there is a sector deal for construction, although the promised "a few weeks" from last November have become nine months.

Like last week's nuclear deal statement, this appears to be a series of reannouncements of previous ministerial policies. The announcement about reducing emissions, although welcome, would be more credible if it were not so starkly at odds with other Government policies, such as last week's cancellation of the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. The steel, retail and rail industries are still awaiting responses to the proposals that they made last September. Perhaps the Minister will tell us when other sector deals will be agreed.

The collapse of Carillion of course caused at least some of the delay in today's announcement, but that in turn was caused by the Government's own lack of oversight, so what assurances will the Minister give to the sector that there will be no more Carillions, and that suppliers and workers can have confidence that Government will support them on Government-funded contracts? And what in this deal will address the concerns around late payment and retentions that the Carillion fiasco highlighted, with 30,000 suppliers owed £2 billion? What was changed during the review of this sector deal from what was announced last year? There appears to be nothing to tackle the problems endemic in public sector construction procurement.

The commitments in this sector deal on productivity and the speed of building are welcome, but they need to be matched by a significant increase in Government investment in infrastructure and house building projects. That is how we can properly support the construction industry. The TUC has shown that the £31 billion through the national productivity fund increases public investment to 2.9% of GDP, whereas the average spent on investment by leading industrial nations in the OECD is higher, at 3.5%. Labour is committed to a national transformation fund of £250 billion of capital investment over 10 years. Comparing those figures, we have to question whether the Government's commitment to investment is meaningful. Similarly, the rhetoric about skills and technical education is welcome, but can the Minister give the sector an assurance that those skills will be developed to enable the radical transformation of construction that this country desperately needs?

There are great concerns about the exploitation of construction workers, often by the use of bogus self-employment, and the abuses of human rights and risks to the safety of too many workers through the behaviour of some unscrupulous employers. What are the Government's plans to protect workers through this deal?

The deal appears to ignore the important role played by smaller firms. What is in the deal for small builders, for whom accessing investment in new technology is likely to be a challenge?

This week's Jaguar Land Rover announcement that it might move production out of the UK and re-evaluate its planned £80 billion of investment is deeply worrying, not least for the 40,000 workers directly employed. JLR's is just the latest in a string of warnings from manufacturers vital to the success of British industry, and the same warnings apply in construction and throughout the construction supply chain. The Government's mishandling of Brexit makes a mockery of their industrial strategy; they must listen to businesses and place workers and our economy ahead of ideology.

Richard Harrington: I thank the shadow spokesman for taking us on a wider canter through industrial strategy and mentioning Brexit. I will try to answer his questions, but I will also do my best to stick to the sector deal, Mr Speaker, as I know you would like to make progress.

I make no excuses about the time this has taken because we wanted to get it right. We are always pressed on occasions like this to use words and phrases like "soon", "imminently" and "at the end of the year".

Bill Esterson: A few weeks?

Richard Harrington: Well, this is a few weeks: we are talking about nine months, and nine times four is about 36 weeks, which is a few weeks compared with 5,000 weeks. But the hon. Gentleman makes a serious point, and we did want to get this right.

Sector deals are no longer just Government edicts. They are true partnerships with not just the usual suspects but lots of companies in industry, and we have done our best to get this right and make it as comprehensive as possible. I am sorry that the delay has put the hon. Gentleman out, but I believe we have got it right, and I welcome the more positive comments he made, among quite a lot of negative ones.

I would make the same point about the other sector deals the hon. Gentleman mentioned, such as that for rail. We are working on them: there is no go-slow; Ministers are not off playing golf. These are very important to me; this is a big chunk of my portfolio and I do hope that at least privately the hon. Gentleman will accept that I do my best with diligence to try to get to the bottom of these things. But they are very comprehensive: the documents may contain a few graphics and things in colour, but they are serious documents, and, more importantly, the deals behind them are very serious.

The hon. Gentleman rightly raises Carillion as that is an important matter. There are a lot of things to be learned for the future from what happened. The Government have worked very well with banks and other institutions. We have taken on board the wider lessons to do with the Insolvency Service and so forth, we have consulted a lot of people on Carillion, and we are on the way to showing companies like Carillion that directors cannot behave irresponsibly, because the consequences are very significant. They affect not only shareholders and banks; they can affect millions of people and small and large businesses alike.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Government's attitude to research and development expenditure. I am proud of our aspiration of 2.9% of GDP for research and development. In dealing now with these bids for the industrial strategy challenge fund and so forth, we are seeing a very significant increase in Government expenditure on research and development. It is a very large part of BEIS's budget.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Labour party's view that everything should happen now or more quickly: well, it did not do so in all the years Labour was in power. I try not to make party political points if I can possibly avoid it, but I think history will show that our record in increasing research and development spending is very good, and in practice sector deals are the conduit through which it is used. Gone are the days when Government Departments and institutions like the National Economic Development Council, which I remember visiting as an A-level economics student at school, did this; gone are the days when civil servants and Ministers decided where this money was invested. There is now a thoughtful process, independently held, in our case through Sir Mark Walport, and I am very hopeful that in the future more money will be spent through this process.

The hon. Gentleman asked a reasonable question about how significant a part of the agenda skills were. For construction, skills are without doubt critical. Most people in construction currently talk about skills shortages, and the increased number of apprentices that is aspired

[Richard Harrington]

to in this sector deal certainly cannot be taken lightly. I have seen the way young people are being trained up through apprenticeships, and there is also the retraining of older people, the T-levels and all the other related educational matters that I do not have time to go into today. They will all make a significant difference to skills.

It is true, too, that different skills will be needed in the future, as I saw from the type of skills being used during a recent visit I made to Skanska, in Rickmansworth near my constituency. Computers are now used not just to make the design we are so used to in building but in the detailed technicalities for each part of the project. I was shown an example in Paddington station where every material for every panel will be passed to owners of the future, because part of the sector deal is about the whole life of buildings, not just the original construction which was traditionally the most important aspect.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman mentioned workers' conditions, and who is and who is not an employee and so forth. He will know about the Taylor review and that the Government are accepting almost every recommendation Taylor makes. That will make a significant difference to people's lives.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are immensely grateful to the Minister, from whom we had a Cook's tour of his personal experiences as a constituency representative. We are deeply indebted to the Minister, although I was wondering at one point whether his response to the shadow Minister would be longer than his original statement, but there we go. I call Mr Kevin Hollinrake, whose beaming countenance is most suitable.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome the statement. It mentions the patient capital review, which aims to increase the availability of long-term finance for innovative firms, so will the Minister confirm that that will be targeted at small and medium-sized construction companies?

Richard Harrington: I will try not to mention a constituency example here, Mr Speaker.

I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Capital is important. It is often spoken about in terms of large fundraising exercises, such as bond issues and initial public offerings, but it is important that small firm financing is also taken into account. The banks are proud of the fact that they are significantly increasing their small business lending, and we intend to monitor that carefully.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank the Minister for advance sight of the statement. I noted with interest that the statement refers to

“a joint £420 million investment from the sector and government” and

“£600 billion of public and private investment in infrastructure over the next 10 years”.

I was wondering about the split between public and private money. With Carillion in mind, where will the risk lie in such joint ventures? It would be remiss of me

not to ask how much of the new money will be given to the Scottish Government to spend, because they have a good track record on major infrastructure builds.

The statement also says that 1.5 million new homes will be built. Will the Minister guarantee that, within the specifications for the new builds, every effort will be made to ensure that buildings are environmentally-friendly to build and energy-efficient to run? There are remarkable examples from around the globe that can be taken on board and copied. The efficiency and longevity of new buildings is crucial.

I welcome the intention to create more apprenticeships, which have been much neglected since the 1980s—hence why a third of the workforce are over 50. The Scottish Government have been leading the way in creating meaningful apprentice schemes, and I am really pleased that this place has decided to follow.

Finally, given that export capability has rightly been identified as so important, will the Minister fight for tariff-free access to European markets at tomorrow's Cabinet showdown on Brexit?

Richard Harrington: I will do best to answer without the global canter that you so politely reprimanded me for using, Mr Speaker. There will be no more cantering, or indeed galloping for that matter. I shall do my best to trot, if that is possible—I promise the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) that I am not trying to cut my answer down.

The SNP spokesman's first question was about the mixture of public and private capital, but that depends on the projects that are available. We know what money is in the current spending plans, but we also know about projects that are coming through, such as Heathrow. I cannot give him an exact split, but we are certain that the total amount that was mentioned will come to fruition, and I am conscious of the fact that Scotland must get its share. That point was well put and well noted. I am certain that Scottish Conservative Members—*[Interruption.]* They are in Scotland. I am sure that all Scottish Members will take me and other Ministers to task if Scotland does not get its fair share.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Richard Harrington: Scotland will get its fair share—*[Interruption.]* Ah, I thank the shadow Minister for pointing out what was happening behind me, because we do not yet have eyes in the backs of our heads, although I am sure that a Labour Government would give them out free to everybody.

The hon. Member for Inverclyde made a good point about fire safety and energy-efficiency specifications for new homes. I have visited the Building Research Establishment in my constituency—I thought you might be interested to know that, Mr Speaker—where state-of-the-art work is going on. If the hon. Gentleman was referring to the terrible tragedy at Grenfell, I am sure that lessons about construction types will be learnt.

Apprenticeships are an important part of the sector deal, and they mean a lot. Apprenticeships do not have to be for school leavers, which has been the tradition. There will be a lot of retraining, and the Government recognise that in their policies, but the purely physical tasks that made up the majority of construction jobs in

the past are slowly being replaced with jobs that require a significant amount of training and a lot less physical effort.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asks me to ensure that the Prime Minister makes it certain at tomorrow's Chequers awayday that UK companies will be able to export their products to the European Union. I can happily assure him that that is very much the case.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I welcome what the Minister says about the 25,000 apprenticeships, but one of the grand challenges facing the Government is helping to meet the needs of an ageing population. How does the deal help to meet that need?

Richard Harrington: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. The answer is that the type of apprenticeships will be commensurate with the new types of skills within building. As I explained in answer to the hon. Member for Inverclyde, that will involve retraining at different ages, as well as jobs that involve skills other than physical skills, which were complex but were done just by young men in the past. In fact, I am pleased to say that many more women are now involved in construction apprenticeships, and we will start to see people of my age doing apprenticeships—quite a few people in my constituency probably hope that that will be me in a few years' time.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister on his pre-reshuffle tour d'horizon of the industry and on a statement that is welcome in both its intentions and its aspirations. However, without any detailed measures, it is frankly just more waffle. For example, the Minister rightly drew attention to the forthcoming infrastructure programme, where local and national Government have huge clout as the client, so will the Government be using that influence to put into their contracts requirements for the prompt payment of subcontractors? In addition, will they demand proper ratios of apprentices on sites, by which I mean real craft apprenticeships to fill the huge skill gaps and to provide career opportunities for our youngsters?

Richard Harrington: I shall send the right hon. Gentleman a copy of the construction sector deal so that he knows that it is not just meaningless waffle, [*Interruption*] I am delighted he has one and I will do my best to respond to the numerous points that he made. He asked whether the Government would use their power over those things that they fund to ensure that small businesses are used—that is correct. The Government are keen on using their power in that way, such as by mandating the use of level 2 building information modelling for all construction projects to encourage the adoption of digital technologies. The Government will also be at the forefront of the manufacturing of buildings off-site for suitable projects, such as schools and NHS buildings.

The right hon. Gentleman was concerned that the Government should not use such powers to affect the number of apprenticeships on site. That is very much our policy, and it will be part of the tender documents to come. However, I hope that that will not be necessary, because the industry is desperate for apprentices and we will see a lot of the new types of apprenticeships.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): In Chelmsford last week, local councillors approved a local plan that includes 8,800 homes on new sites, and 11,700 homes have already been approved. We are building schools, GP surgeries, community centres and the amazing new medical school, so masses of construction is ongoing. The sector deal is welcome, but Chelmsford College has two issues. One is finding tutors with the experience to teach apprenticeships; the other is getting apprentices placed with smaller businesses such as electricians. Can you focus on addressing those two pinch points?

Richard Harrington: Mr Speaker, I thought you were going to reprimand my hon. Friend for referring to me as "you"; thank you for forgiving her.

I accept that finding more tutors is a problem, and the Construction Industry Training Board is cognisant of that. The Government are making sure everything is done with the training board and there will be new apprenticeship standards. The number of starts will increase to about 25,000, which is a 15% increase. I regularly meet the training board, and I will happily ensure that it is aware of the specific points raised about Chelmsford.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Minister will be aware that 30% of people who work in the construction sector in London are EU nationals and that they are younger than their UK equivalents. Meanwhile, the number of apprenticeships has plummeted, particularly for under-25s. What guarantee can he give that we will have sufficient skilled people available, particularly given that the construction sector will be in competition with sectors such as agriculture for those employees? I expect, of course, a very comprehensive reply from the Minister.

Richard Harrington: I will do my best—under your supervision, Mr Speaker—to make sure that my reply is comprehensive.

Skilled labour from the European Union is critical to the construction industry, which already competes with all the other industries. Mr Speaker, you will be delighted to hear that last week I visited a wonderful business: Gateville in Watford, which was started by a Romanian gentleman, Bogdan Catargiu. The company is using his skills, and those of his colleagues from this country and the European Union, to build social housing in the UK. Following Brexit, I cannot envisage a situation in which we will not allow people with the necessary skills, such as those in the construction industry, to come to this country to work, and to provide a lot of prosperity to this country—and, I hope, to themselves—as they have over the past few decades.

Mr Speaker: It is always a great pleasure to listen to the mellifluous tones of the Minister, who I know from personal experience to be an extremely agreeable fellow, but I gently point out to the House that the statement has now run for half an hour and we have heard from only five Back Benchers. Perhaps there is scope for an improvement in productivity, to be brilliantly exemplified, I feel sure, by Mr Eddie Hughes.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): I am approaching my 50th birthday in October and I am concerned by the undertones suggesting that that is in any way old.

[Eddie Hughes]

I am a member of the Chartered Institute of Building and a fan of innovative technology such as blockchain. What can these new technologies do to improve productivity in the construction sector deal?

Mr Speaker: We often hear from the hon. Gentleman about this blockchain business. I feel I ought to educate myself on the matter.

Richard Harrington: Mr Speaker, I feel you are asking me to produce a sector deal for brevity of statements by junior Ministers—I will start work immediately.

The type of skills we need are changing, as we see more modular building and so on. I am sure that the skills that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) and I are aware of now will be very different from the skills needed by generations to come. I expect that he and I will use some skills in our 80s that we did not use 30 years ago. The important part of the sector deal is to make sure that apprenticeships are appropriate for a sector in which one third of the construction workforce are now over 50. Under this fantastic sector deal, the training board and the standards will evolve as the building industry evolves.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I urge the Minister to get a gallop on and announce the sector deal for renewables, which is an important industry for us in East Yorkshire. We are keen to see that sector deal announced. When will he provide details on the local sector deals, which were first announced at the end of last year?

Richard Harrington: We have another horse analogy. I said that I would trot, and I have been accused of cantering, but now I will try to gallop. I note the hon. Lady's point about the local sector deals, and her area is one of our higher priorities. I cannot answer her question about renewables because that is not one of my sectors, but perhaps I can drop her a line or meet her to discuss it.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): I strongly welcome the construction sector deal. With productivity in the construction sector on average 21% lower than in the rest of the economy, it is vital that we tackle that to increase our housing stock. Does the Minister agree that investing in digital and off-site manufacturing technologies will also boost our STEM sector? That is vital for constituencies such as mine, which is a hub of engineering, design and technology.

Richard Harrington: The sector deal shows that those types of skills will be adapted to building. Digital technology, artificial intelligence and precisely the STEM skills that my hon. Friend mentions are an important part of the sector deal and of the future construction industry.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): What discussions have there been with the devolved Assemblies on match funding for energy-efficient new builds? What is being done to encourage every region to make full use of this initiative?

Richard Harrington: The devolved authorities are very much part of all our thinking. We will continue to work closely with them. I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss Northern Ireland in this context. I congratulate him on his question—and on the questions he has asked at every single statement I have given and every single urgent question I have answered in Parliament.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Is it not the case that if there were further incentives for construction companies and developers to build out, they would be forced, as it were, to recruit and train more people, because they would need them, rather than moving people from one site to another? Is it possible for the Government to consider compulsory purchase powers for local authorities if developers do not build after a couple of years or, indeed, to consider charging council tax 12 months after a planning application is approved, rather than when the build-out occurs?

Richard Harrington: The review by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) is considering those points, and I am sure that we will be delighted to report the review's progress to the House.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): As a chartered civil engineer, I welcome the principle of the construction sector deal. On protecting the supply chain, the Government must deal with two key issues: the elimination of cash retentions; and, as the Minister knows from his previous role, the effect that multi-employer pensions are having on subcontractors, particularly plumbers. Will the Minister review the Multi-employer Pension Schemes Bill—my private Member's Bill—and have a word with the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), to ask him to take on board the measures in my Bill?

Richard Harrington: We are currently considering the entire policy on retentions, as I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows. We are reviewing the responses to our consultation and considering the options for future policy.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): When we consider construction, we often think about only what we see above ground. Saint-Gobain and Stanton Bonna in my constituency make pressed concrete and cast pipework. Can the Minister reassure the House that his statement on the construction sector deal will benefit all aspects of construction, whether invisible or visible?

Richard Harrington: Absolutely; I can reassure my hon. Friend on that point.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What is there in the construction sector deal to encourage small builders in Kettering?

Richard Harrington: My hon. Friend, as always, speaks up for Kettering, and he does so well. Kettering is typical of many places in the country where small businesses are the core of the construction industry. The sector deal is not silent about that. [Interruption.] The shadow Minister is chuntering that he made that point—he did, and he is absolutely right.

Small businesses are the core of the construction industry. On every visit I have made to the tier 1 large contractors, they have been very conscious that small businesses are part of the industry. We have to make sure that those small businesses get their share of the expenditure on apprenticeships, as they are getting, and make it easier for them to get apprentices, which we are doing. The training board and the industry bodies we work with are conscious of that.

Amesbury Incident

12.49 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement regarding the events that have been unfolding in Amesbury and Salisbury. This morning, I chaired a meeting of the Government's emergency committee, Cobra, covering the ongoing investigation in Amesbury. I have been separately briefed by the security services and by counter-terrorism police.

As many Members will now know, a 45-year-old man and a 44-year-old woman were found to be unwell at a property at Muggleton Road in Amesbury on Saturday—both are British citizens. Paramedics attended the scene and admitted the pair to the accident and emergency department at Salisbury District Hospital, where they were treated for exposure to an unknown substance. Further testing by expert scientists in chemical warfare at the Porton Down laboratory confirmed this to be the nerve agent of the type known as Novichok. This has been identified as the same nerve agent that contaminated both Yulia and Sergei Skripal.

The pair are currently in a critical condition, and I am sure the whole House will want to join me in wishing them a full and swift recovery. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the emergency services and staff at the Salisbury District Hospital for their tireless professionalism and for the dedicated care they are providing. I understand that there will be some concerns about what this incident means for public safety. In particular, I recognise that some local Wiltshire residents will be feeling very anxious. Let me reassure everyone that public safety is of paramount importance. Public Health England's latest assessment is that based on the number of casualties affected, there is no significant risk to the wider public. Its advice is informed by scientists and the police as the facts evolve. Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer, has confirmed that the risk to the public remains low, and has asked that the public follow the advice of Public Health England and the police. She has also advised that people who have visited the areas that have been recently cordoned off should wash their clothes and wipe down any items they may have been carrying at the time. She has also urged people not to pick up any unknown or already dangerous objects such as needles and syringes. That is not new advice and it follows on from what was said in March. We have a well-established response to these types of incidents and clear processes to follow.

I also want to add that all the sites that have been decontaminated following the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal are safe. All sites that have been reopened have undergone rigorous testing, and any items that may have harboured residual amounts of the agent were safely removed for disposal. We have taken a very robust approach to decontamination, and there is no evidence that either the man or the woman in hospital visited any of the places that were visited by the Skripals. Our strong working assumption is that the couple came into contact with the nerve agent in a different location from the sites that have been part of the original clean-up operation. The police have also set up two dedicated phone numbers for anyone with concerns relating to this incident. Salisbury District Hospital

[Sajid Javid]

remains open as usual and is advising people to attend routine operations unless they are contacted and told otherwise.

We are taking this incident incredibly seriously and are working around the clock to discover precisely what has happened, where and why. Be assured that we have world-leading scientists, intelligence officers and police on this case. Local residents can expect to see an increased police presence in and around Amesbury and Salisbury. All six sites that were visited by the pair before they collapsed have been cordoned off and are being securely guarded as a precaution. An investigation has started to work out how these two individuals came into contact with the nerve agent. About 100 detectives from the counter-terrorism policing network are working to support this investigation, alongside colleagues from Wiltshire police.

Obviously, this incident will invoke memories of the reckless attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal earlier this year, given the similarities. I know that many Members will question whether this incident is linked to that one. That is clearly the main line of inquiry. However, we must not jump to conclusions and we must give the police the space and time to carry out their investigations—the police's work will take time. But we are ready to respond as and when new evidence comes to light and the situation becomes clearer.

Following the events in Salisbury earlier this year, we rapidly worked with international partners at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to confirm our identification of the nerve agent used. Through a process of extensive, impartial testing and analysis, our findings were confirmed correct beyond doubt. The use of chemical weapons anywhere is barbaric and inhumane. The decision taken by the Russian Government to deploy them in Salisbury on 4 March was reckless and callous. There is no plausible alternative explanation to explain the events in March other than that the Russian state was responsible, and we acted accordingly. The British Government and the international community immediately and robustly condemned this inhuman action. In the light of this attack, the UK expelled 23 Russian diplomats from our shores, and we were joined by 28 of our closest international allies in this action, ranging from the United States to Ukraine, who expelled more than 150 of the Russian state's diplomats.

We have already seen multiple explanations from state-sponsored Russian media regarding this latest incident. We can anticipate further disinformation from the Kremlin, as we saw following the Salisbury attack. As we did before, we will be consulting our international partners and allies following these latest developments. The eyes of the world are currently on Russia, not least because of the World Cup. It is now time that the Russian state comes forward and explains exactly what has gone on. Let me be clear: we do not have a quarrel with the Russian people. Rather, it is the actions of the Russian Government that continue to undermine our security and that of the international community. We will stand up to actions that threaten our security and the security of our partners. It is completely unacceptable for our people to be either deliberate or accidental targets, or for our streets, parks or towns to be dumping grounds

for poison. We will continue our investigations as a matter of urgency, and I will keep the House and the public updated on any significant developments. I commend this statement to the House.

12.57 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for making his statement to this House and for giving me prior sight of it. The whole House appreciates that he came here directly from a Cobra meeting. As he said, the first duty of any Government is to secure the safety and security of their people and all those resident in this country. No Government can allow the poisoning of their citizens or residents as they go about their daily lives, by state actors or others. As he has said, the use of chemical weapons is both barbaric and inhumane. Our thoughts and best wishes go out to Dawn Sturgess and Charlie Rowley, and we wish them a speedy and complete recovery. I would also like to place on the record the admiration and support we on this side of the House have for the work of the emergency services, the security services and the vital public servants at Porton Down.

The Home Secretary will appreciate how alarmed the public, particularly the people of Wiltshire, must be at this second incident involving the nerve agent Novichok in four months. This incident has occurred long after local people had been assured that there had been a thorough clean-up of the area. We understood that numerous areas across Salisbury had been decontaminated, at great expense and with great thoroughness. It is still not clear whether this is a wholly separate incident or the fall-out from the original incident but with effects being felt months apart.

The Home Secretary will appreciate that if there are connections, other than the type of nerve agent involved, between this latest incident and the Skripal case, the House and the general public will obviously want to know as soon as possible. The House has not received an update on the Skripal case for some time; the Home Secretary may wish to take this opportunity to update the House and the general public about ongoing work on the Skripal case. The House and the public at large will want reassurance, but they will want it to be based on facts. I agree with the Home Secretary that we should not jump to conclusions. We need the facts on this serious matter, and no doubt Members from all parties will resist the temptation to engage in wild speculation or to offer their own guesswork as informed opinion.

Members from all parties, along with the general public, will eventually want to understand how this incident could have occurred. The public will also be concerned about other issues. Do the local police have the resources that they need? Will the Government be providing them and the local authority with additional emergency funding for the enormous drain on resources that this investigation and the securing of various sites will inevitably involve? As well as causing great public concern, this second incident will be a blow to business and retail in the area. Local businesses were just recovering from the Salisbury fallout; what support will they be given? Will the Secretary of State assure the public that this new clean-up and decontamination effort will be exemplary in its thoroughness?

There are some matters that the Secretary of State might usefully raise with his colleagues in the Department

of Health and Social Care. Do all relevant emergency workers and health professionals have sufficient information to recognise the symptoms of this type of poisoning? Do they have advice on how to respond to suspected cases? The public will have noted that although Dawn Sturgess and Charlie Rowley took ill on Saturday night and were taken to exactly the same hospital as the Skripals, it apparently took two days to refer the case to Porton Down.

As the Home Secretary said, the eyes of the world are on Russia. We will all have seen the very warm and enthusiastic response of the Russian people to people coming from all over the world for the World cup. The Opposition supported the expulsion of the 23 Russian diplomats and the other related actions that Her Majesty's Government took in the wake of the Salisbury incident, and we will support any action that the Government take that will keep our people safe. We cannot allow the streets of ordinary British towns and communities to become killing fields for state actors.

Sajid Javid: I thank the right hon. Lady for her support and her comments and join her in stating again that the whole House wishes the victims a very speedy recovery. I very much welcome her questions, which I shall try to respond to in turn.

The right hon. Lady asked, perfectly correctly, for reassurance that this incident is not connected in any way to the areas that were decontaminated after the original incident back in March. We are very comfortable that that is not the case—and that is not just the view of Ministers on their own; it is the view of experts, especially the decontamination experts. They are clear that the decontamination exercise was successful, as is Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer, and we are happy to say that those areas are all safe. We are also comfortable that, from what we know, in this particular incident neither individual contracted or came into contact with the nerve agent at any of the decontaminated areas. That is our belief.

The right hon. Lady asked whether there was any more information on the connection between this incident and the original incident. That is of course the main line of inquiry for the police, for obvious reasons, but as she alluded to—it is worth restating—none of us should rush to prejudge the outcome of the investigation. As more evidence and any information comes out, we will of course share that with Members and with the wider public.

The right hon. Lady rightly raised the issue of resources, and I can reassure her on that. In fact, one of the main things that we discussed at the Cobra meeting earlier was ensuring that all the necessary resources are made available, as they were back in March. We wanted to make sure that that applied to everyone involved in dealing with this incident, but particularly local police, CT policing and the security services. I am comfortable that any resources required will be provided and any further requests will be met. That will be a priority for us.

The right hon. Lady mentioned the impact on the local area, and she was right to do so. People local to the area were heroic in their response to the original attack and have united, together as a community, and sent a clear message of support for each other. At the time of the original incident, there was a lot of support

from the local council, Wiltshire Council, and from local political leaders, including my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen), who contacted me at the moment he knew about the incident to ask about further support. We are looking at what more can be done. We will meet the leader of the local council, Baroness Jane Scott, and talk about precisely that, and we will also talk about, as the right hon. Lady mentioned, local businesses, many of which were just starting to recover. Whether they are high street shops or part of the local tourist trade, we want to make sure that their business is as unaffected as possible, so we are looking at what further support we can provide to them. The right hon. Lady was absolutely right to raise that point.

The right hon. Lady asked about local health expertise. The Department of Health and Social Care is of course making sure that if any extra resources are required, they will be provided to the health services. It is particularly important that, given that it is where the victims are, Salisbury District Hospital has all the support needed. My current understanding is that in respect of the two victims in this case, the health professionals in the hospital were able to use some of the experience that they gained from March's incident in their approach, which meant that the right type of medical support was provided earlier than it perhaps would have been otherwise. There is considerable local expertise, but of course if more needs to be provided, it will be.

Lastly, the right hon. Lady asked me about an update on the police investigation into the original case. That investigation is of course ongoing and involves CT policing, local police and the security services, but it would be inappropriate for me to say anything further on that at this point.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): We can be sure that this incident will be used by Russian state misinformation campaigns to try further to obfuscate what happened in March. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital that we counter that through a steady drumbeat of telling the truth about what happened in March and of giving as much information about this incident as we can, when we can?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to make that point. He will know that the Russian disinformation campaign has already begun. As soon as this news was made public yesterday, we saw that, certainly on social media. For that reason and many more, it is important that, as more evidence of what happened emerges, the UK, together with our international allies, presents that to the public and makes it very clear and very factual.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I thank the Home Secretary for advance sight of his statement. As others have said, our immediate thoughts are with Charlie Rowley and Dawn Sturgess, whom we wish a very speedy and full recovery. They are completely innocent victims in this whole affair. I endorse the statements that have been made about our support for the emergency services; we can only wonder about the concern that they themselves must feel for their own personal safety when they cope with matters of this kind.

[Tommy Sheppard]

I particularly welcome the Home Secretary's statement in two regards. First, it is important to reassure the public that there is no generalised threat to the wider community and dampen down irresponsible speculation that might be to the contrary. I also welcome the fact that he draws a distinction between the Russian people and the Russian state, particularly at this time. We should try hard to make sure that that message resonates within Russia itself, particularly given the events that are happening there at the moment.

I wish to press the Home Secretary in two respects. First, he says that people will naturally be concerned to understand the link, if any, between this incident and the Skripal case. Is it possible for him to identify whether the Novichok in this instance is from the same batch as was used in the Skripal case, or will that not be possible, and will he therefore not be able to say whether there is a direct link? Secondly, he has updated the House on the expulsion of diplomats, but, of course, there was a great range of other measures discussed as well in response to the incident on 4 March. If he is not able to do this now, can he say when he will be in a position to update the House on other matters, particularly with regard to the seizure of Russian state assets and to improving checks at our borders?

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his response. Again, he has made a number of important points. I join him in commending the work of the emergency services; their response has been absolutely exceptional both back in March and, from what we have seen, in the past few days. He is also right to emphasise the distinction between the Russian people and the Russian state. Our quarrel is with the Russian state, not with the Russian people. In the World cup so far, the Russian people's response and welcome to British fans and to the British team has been very nice to see, which emphasises the point that he has made.

The hon. Gentleman asked two questions: one about the nerve agent and the second about Russian action. On the nerve agent, scientists from Porton Down are absolutely clear that this is the exact same type of nerve agent from the Novichok family of nerve agents that was used in the March attack, so we are very clear on that. He asked specifically about the batch. We cannot attribute this to the same batch at this point, but scientists will be looking into that. I have been told that that may not even be possible because of a number of factors, but we cannot rule out, of course, that it was from the same batch. Although we are comfortable that it is the exact same nerve agent, we cannot at this point say that it is from the exact same batch.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about any further action against Russia. I think that I said in the statement that, as we continue with the investigation and as evidence emerges, we will respond accordingly.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I strongly support my right hon. Friend's statement today and the information that he has given us. Obviously, local people will need maximum reassurance. Will he reaffirm that the risk to the general public is very low and that the Government's top priority is the safety and wellbeing of local residents?

Sajid Javid: I am very happy to reaffirm that. The statements made yesterday by the chief medical officer and Public Health England were very reassuring; the risk to the public remains low. There is advice from the chief medical officer for those whom I mentioned briefly in my statement—those who believe that they may have been in some of the same areas that are now cordoned off to take some precautionary action. That kind of belt and braces approach is very appropriate, but the risk to the public remains very low.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement. Our police, intelligence officers and medical staff are among the best in the world, and I know that they will be doing everything possible to keep people safe and to pursue this vile crime against this couple and the original Skripal attack. Can he confirm that he has had no co-operation from the Russian Government, which would be both revealing and shocking in itself? Will he also say a little bit more about Novichok and whether or how it degrades or deteriorates and how easy it is to detect, as he will be aware that there is already conflicting information and, potentially, misinformation being circulated on this?

Sajid Javid: I thank the right hon. Lady for her question. First, I can confirm that we have had no co-operation from the Russian Government, but given their responsibility for the original attack and their campaign of disinformation, no one in the House should be surprised about that. I have made it clear today that, if the Russians wanted to respond in a positive way and provide more information—for example, on Novichok and on how they disposed of the nerve agent, if they did—they could, but they have clearly chosen not to. I have no doubt that, in the coming days and weeks, we will see an increased campaign of disinformation from the Russian state.

The right hon. Lady specifically asks about Novichok and that type of nerve agent. Like all nerve agents, it will deteriorate over some time, but my understanding is that, in the case of this type of nerve agent, that some time could be months and months. Therefore, it is scientifically perfectly possible that this nerve agent came from the same batch; it could well be the exact same nerve agent that was used in March because it would not have had enough time to deteriorate in any meaningful way.

The right hon. Lady also asks about detecting a nerve agent. It is not easy to detect at all. Detection equipment is available for radioactive substances, but detecting a nerve agent is a very different matter and there is no easy way at all to detect it. There are some ways to help find it, but it is hard to detect. That said, the considerable experience that we built up back in March will help us in responding to this incident, too.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Understandably, a significant number of Members wish to participate in these exchanges and to question the Home Secretary. There is a debate to follow on proxy voting, which is well subscribed and which risks having very little time left for it. If that were to transpire, it would be open to the Government to reschedule that debate on another occasion so that Members

were not disappointed, but, in the meantime, if people could ask short questions and the Home Secretary could provide short replies that would help.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): It is quite extraordinary and shocking to hear the statements that are already coming out of Russia. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is really important that we work with our international allies to counter the fake news and the disinformation coming from Russia and others?

Sajid Javid: Yes, I very much agree with my hon. Friend. That is exactly what we have been doing, especially since the incident in March. This recent incident is a reminder that there is more to do.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I thank the Home Secretary for his excellent statement and join others in celebrating his distinction between our condemnation of the Russian Government and our support for the Russian people. His careful phrasing today and his diplomatic sensitivity is vital. Will he reassure the House that all Ministers will follow his lead and his calm strength?

Sajid Javid: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): May I stress the need to support local organisations? Budgeting in an annual budget cycle for an international chemical weapons attack simply does not happen, so the local council, the local hospital, the local police force and local businesses need financial support from central Government, and they need it quickly.

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on that point. He will recall that, when the previous incident happened, I was the Local Government Secretary and was very much aware of that. We provided support then, and we will certainly be providing support again this time.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The Home Secretary referred in his statement to the strong solidarity that Britain's allies had shown to us in the wake of the Skripal incident a few months ago. Is he confident that we can maintain strong solidarity in the wake of this incident among liberal democracies, and does he agree that that is essential when the forces of nationalism are on the rise in a number of countries?

Sajid Javid: I very much agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Having that unity among freedom-loving nations is very important in the face of this type of incident. There are a number of important multilateral events coming up: the western Balkans summit, the NATO summit and the visit to the UK by the President of America. Those are all fresh opportunities to build on that solidarity.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): When does the Home Secretary expect the police to be able to update the public?

Sajid Javid: I understand that people will want to hear from the police investigation as soon as possible, but from what I heard from the police in the briefing I received this morning, it will take some time. We need to

give them that time, but I assure my hon. Friend that as we get more information we will bring it to this House immediately.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): If and when the Government come to the conclusion that Russia was responsible for this attack—whether through targeting or by accident—will the Government pursue further co-ordinated action with our allies in response?

Sajid Javid: We absolutely need to keep all options open. I think that the hon. Gentleman would understand that the focus right here and now—certainly in today's Cobra meeting—is very much on public safety, the police investigation and supporting the victims. I am sure that we will be considering other options as more information comes to light.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): Obviously, this situation is distressing and it is being monitored by many of our constituents all around the country. Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that the incident is being treated with the utmost seriousness and that the Government are being regularly updated on developments?

Sajid Javid: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. From the moment we knew about the incident, we have responded in that way—and not just the Government, but, just as importantly, local emergency services, the local council, local police and counter-terrorism police. We will keep treating the situation as an absolute priority.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What more can the Government do to tackle the misinformation coming out from the Russian state about this issue?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady asks another important question. There are no easy ways. Since the March incident we—not just the Government, but the wider responsible media, Members of Parliament and others—have learnt to call out misinformation whenever we see it. This misinformation is often directed not only at us or the British public, but at a wider international audience, so working with our international allies can also help.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): From the statement today and statements after the March incident, it is quite clear that our agencies are world-leading and well recognised as being so throughout the world. Will the Secretary of State reassure the House that those agencies will have all the resources that they need to get to the bottom of this situation?

Sajid Javid: Yes. As my hon. Friend will know, a number of agencies and organisations are involved in addressing this incident—to deal not only with the criminal investigation, but the health issues—and I can give my hon. Friend that assurance.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The St Petersburg troll factories and the RT propaganda channel are already gearing up to spread misinformation. Could we not at least do a little bit more to expose this? In particular, would Members of all parties in this House not appear on Putin's propaganda television channel?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this issue. There have been far too many incidents when Members have sadly supported the Russia propaganda regime, and RT is one way in which they have done so. If any Member has an ounce of common sense, they will realise—especially after this second incident—that the British public will not support any of them if they support President Putin.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): The Croatian Prime Minister told me last week at the Council of Europe that the evidence that made him expel a Russian diplomat had been absolutely compelling. Will the Home Secretary ensure that the evidence that he produces will be just as compelling in this case?

Sajid Javid: This is an opportunity to highlight just how seriously we take evidence and the facts. Already our world-leading scientists have been involved in the identification of the nerve agent in this incident, and that is exactly how we will proceed. As we gather that evidence, of course we will discuss it with our international allies.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The Home Secretary is right to draw a distinction between the Russian Government and the Russian people. With a potential clash between Russia and England in the World cup, what conversations has he had with the Foreign Secretary to ensure that English fans in Russia are being kept up to date through regularly updated Foreign Office travel advice?

Sajid Javid: Even before the World cup started, a robust and well-thought-through plan was put in place after work between my Department, the police and others to support British fans in Russia. In the light of this incident, we will certainly be reviewing that information. There is nothing at this point to indicate that the risk to fans in Russia has changed in any way, but we want to keep that under review.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Novichok was developed by the Soviet Union in the '70s and '80s. It is down to the Russians to fill in the gaps. If they cannot do so, the assumption has to be made as it has been. Will the Home Secretary absolutely assure us that—notwithstanding our success going into the World cup and the way in which we have warmed towards the Russian people—we will not let up on the Russian state, which stands accused of attempting to murder our citizens?

Sajid Javid: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. He will understand that although this incident has a leading line of inquiry—the connection with the previous incident—we do not want to jump to conclusions. If it is established that the Russian state is entirely responsible for this incident as well, of course we will consider what further action we can take.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Russia is receiving lots of positive coverage at the moment because of the World cup. Therefore, tackling the disinformation issue is that much more important. Has the Home Secretary or anyone else called in the Russian ambassador to hold him to account for this incident

and to say that the level of disinformation that Russia is propagating is completely unacceptable and will be challenged?

Sajid Javid: At this point, we have not called in the Russian ambassador. We will want to consider what further action we can take as this investigation develops, and that may well include speaking to the Russian ambassador.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): The Amesbury incident is shocking, and I wish the pair affected a swift recovery. I am deeply concerned for Salisbury's local economy and community. Will my right hon. Friend commit to the necessary support for Wiltshire to get through this? Will he also stress again that the Government's priority is the safety of residents and that the risk to Wiltshire residents remains low?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to raise this point. As a local MP, she will be concerned and will be hearing concerns from her constituents. I can give her that commitment: we will support the local economy, local businesses and local people in every way that we can. I discussed the matter this morning with the Communities Secretary, who shares that desire to help in every way that we can.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for his statement. This must, understandably, be a time of great anxiety for local residents. Will he confirm that they are receiving all the public health advice that we can provide?

Sajid Javid: Yes, I can confirm that. There will obviously be more advice to come, as we learn more from the chief medical officer and Public Health England. The police and other agencies are working closely with the health authorities to ensure that the public health advice is updated at all times. Let me reiterate that the advice from the chief medical officer and Public Health England is that the risk to the public remains low.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): The Salisbury attack and Russian disinformation shows how important it is to continue saying our side of the story. I understand that the BBC World Service is considering a considerable uplift in its broadcasting activities in the Balkans, eastern Europe and on the borders of Russia. Will the Home Secretary consider giving his support to the BBC World Service at this time, because it is clearly crucial to our safety at home?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend raises an important point. It is right that we look at how we can counter much of the disinformation out there that is coming from Russia, and the BBC World Service can play an important role in doing so.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): There will be a great temptation to engage in speculation following this latest incident. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the police must be given the space that they need to be able to fully investigate the facts and establish exactly what happened?

Sajid Javid: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. As she will know, the police investigation has already begun. From the moment that this was declared a major incident, it has involved not just local policing but substantial support from counter-terrorism policing. Over 100 officers from counter-terrorism policing are already involved in this new incident. We will continue to make sure that they get the resources that are needed and are given the time to complete their work.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): On Sunday, I drove through Salisbury on my way to the excellent Chalk valley history festival, also attended by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Driving through the city, one cannot but be struck by the historic beauty of Salisbury, particularly its cathedral. Obviously, Salisbury's local economy is highly dependent on international tourism. Will the Home Secretary send out a message to those people intending to visit Salisbury and nearby Stonehenge that they must continue to do so against the threat of what is effectively terrorism? They should attend Stonehenge, go to Salisbury and enjoy the wonderful historic sites.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is himself a distinguished historian. I trust that he was not merely attending the festival but orating at it.

Chris Skidmore *indicated assent.*

Mr Speaker: That is very reassuring to all Members.

Sajid Javid: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Obviously, Salisbury is one of the most beautiful places in our country—[*Interruption.*] My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) shouts, “On earth.” I think we will have to agree with him on that. Whether by visiting Salisbury itself, nearby towns and villages or Stonehenge, this is a very good way that we can show our support. I would not only encourage members of the public to continue with their plans, but suggest that perhaps it is time to give ourselves an extra reason to make such a plan and be more determined to make a specific, special visit.

Points of Order

2.32 pm

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your advice on a matter that has caused me some concern. While I was out of the country representing the United Kingdom at the Council of Europe, I received an email from an organisation called Global Justice Now. It told me that I would have received emails over the weekend from my constituents with the subject, “MPs not border guards”. It said that owing to a filtering system failure in its organisation, constituents would be thanking me for signing a pledge, which in fact I had not done, nor am I aware that I had even been asked to do so. This pledge apparently said that if anybody visited a constituency surgery of mine who was an illegal immigrant, I would undertake not to report them to the authorities.

I am really concerned, Mr Speaker, that an unaccountable organisation can actually send out information to my constituents about activities in my constituency surgery, effectively telling lies about me, and I have no opportunity to correct it. I appreciate that I am putting this on the record with you now, but could you perhaps take it away and look at how Members of Parliament can protect themselves against this sort of misinformation about their activities, because it is highly damaging and these organisations are not accountable?

Mr Speaker: I can well understand why the right hon. Lady is very perturbed about the matter. On hearing her explanation of the sequence of events, I rather imagine that other Members listening will be similarly concerned for her, and potentially for themselves. As she says, this organisation is not accountable. I have to admit that it is not an organisation of which I have previously heard, but I have now done so. The matter certainly warrants some thought, and I will give it that thought, including speaking about it to the Parliamentary Security Director on the right hon. Lady's and others' behalf. As and when I have anything to disclose to her or to the House, she or the House—possibly both—will hear it.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I will arrange for my office to send you the email trail so that you have the evidence of what was sent to me. I am grateful for your undertaking to look into this matter.

Mr Speaker: I look forward to the receipt of that email trail. Well, I do not know whether I look forward to it or not, but I know that I can expect to receive it. I think that would be helpful to all concerned.

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

Mr Speaker: I will come to the hon. Gentleman, but it would be a pity to squander him too early.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to raise with you an issue that I have encountered in recent days. The pedestrian entrance at Carriage Gates has relatively new card-swipe machines that are quite glitchy, and there have been a couple of occasions when I have struggled to get in—

[Alex Burghart]

fortunately not at a time when I was coming in for a vote. However, as someone who often cuts things quite fine in getting to the Chamber to vote, I would not want to find that I, or indeed other hon. Members, could not get through Carriage Gates in a hurry and that that affected our business in the Chamber. To whom should I report this concern, and what is the procedure for trying to address it?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman could inform the Serjeant at Arms about the matter, or if he wishes to raise it with Eric Hepburn, the Parliamentary Security Director, it is open to him to do so. I think it is a fairly safe bet, though, that the Parliamentary Security Director will come to learn of the point that the hon. Gentleman has made. Clearly, it is very important that these glitches should be reduced to a minimum and that the system should be operationally efficient sooner rather than later.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have just come from a sitting of the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill Committee. To say that temperatures in Committee Room 12 are bordering on stifling would be an understatement. We—Members—and officials are luckily at liberty to remove our jackets, but it was brought to my attention that the same courtesy is not extended to the Doorkeepers, who have to remain in full rig throughout, no matter what the temperature. Might you offer guidance on how action might be taken to allow our hard-working and dedicated Doorkeepers the same rights as ourselves in relation to making their workplace conditions as comfortable as possible in the current conditions?

Mr Speaker: Personally, I very much agree with that. It is not a matter that has been raised with me before. I remember that when I used to sit on the Panel of Chairs before my fortunate election to the office of Speaker, I was one of those who always took the view that in hot conditions Members should be able to take off their jackets. It was not a view universally held by Chairs. There were Chairs emanating from both sides of the House who took what I thought was an excessively trad view of the matter. However, the point that the hon. Gentleman makes is an important one. That which we make available to ourselves should be made more widely available. I would not want dedicated, hard-working, conscientious staff to be working in conditions of extreme discomfort, so I hope that that point can be registered. I think it is probably a matter of discretion for the Chair. If it is not, it should be, and if it is, they should know how to exercise that discretion in a way that would commend itself to the hon. Gentleman and, I suspect, to Members across the House.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that due to pressures of time, the Government have pulled the next debate on the principle of proxy voting in the House of Commons. That is of course a great shame, although I understand that there are pressing matters of state in play at the moment. On 1 February, we passed a motion in this House to look at proxy voting. The Procedure Committee,

which I chair, published its report on 15 May. We are some two months from that point and five months-plus from 1 February. I am a man of great patience, Mr Speaker, but babies are not as patient as I am. A number of colleagues who are expecting to give birth in the next few weeks were rather hoping that we would get on to this business, if not today, then perhaps next week.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. We talk a lot about efficiency in this place, and we demand efficiency of business. I have to say that I do not see today as being a great example of efficiency when it comes to looking at the issue of baby leave. It is clear that we have to discuss issues that arise, such as the dreadful incident in Amesbury, but I urge the Government to look at rescheduling the baby leave debate as soon as possible. Time waits for no pregnant woman, and I can see a bump over there that is significantly bigger than it was five months ago when we first debated this issue.

Mr Speaker: I will respond to those points of order, but as I think it is on the same theme, I would like to hear from the shadow Leader of the House.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. In support of what my colleagues have said, can we have an indication of when we are likely to get the debate back? It is quite urgent.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The biological clock is ticking. Last year I took maternity leave, and I suffered reputational damage due to one of the newspapers branding me a lazy MP who was not here for a lot of the time. Three of our colleagues are expecting babies in the next few months, and the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) has recently had her baby. I hope we can get proxy voting in place for the recess, in time for those hon. Members during their maternity leave.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. This is absolutely ridiculous. People have come here in good faith to debate baby leave, which is very important. As we have heard, time is pressing. Can the Government give us a date for when the debate will happen? Will it happen before recess? How many more babies have to be born to Members of the House before we get some modern practices in place to take care of those women and their babies?

Mr Speaker: I will respond to all these points at the end, but I may as well take the remaining points of order.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. If there is to be a delay to the debate on proxy voting, can we at least ensure that in the meantime, the pairing system operated by the Whips is giving our pregnant colleagues the flexibility that they need?

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. May I impress upon you and Members of the House, including members of the Government who might be listening,

that it was many months ago that we debated this issue and Members on both sides of the House made urgent and eloquent contributions about how important this was? That was in advance of us knowing how many colleagues might be affected, and now we are at a juncture at which many of our colleagues will be affected. The reputational issues for many of us who have previously been in this situation were extensive, and we do not know what is around the corner in terms of future elections. For a variety of reasons, it is critical that the Government respond.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The motion on the Order Paper was just for a general debate. Perhaps matters could be shortened if the Government were now to table a substantive motion that could be debated next week. We could then reach a decision on this, because we were not going to be able to reach a decision today anyway.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I rise to support the Chair of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker). Our Committee did this work at an accelerated pace and published a report some time ago, as he said. There is no reason whatsoever for this delay. As I said to the Leader of the House in business questions last week, we need to get on with this. I agree very much with the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) that it would be a good idea to move to a vote on the recommendation of the Procedure Committee, which has diligently done its job under its excellent Chair.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Many Members have mentioned the bumps and the time pressure. There will also be expectant fathers, so to speak, who are feeling the time pressure.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. On that very theme, this is a picture of my daughter who will be born in the autumn, so I am particularly keen to see this measure put in place as soon as possible.

On a serious point, where is the Leader of the House? The Government have just unilaterally changed the business of the House this afternoon. I am the acting Whip for the Scottish National party today, and I found out by a rumour that this had happened. It is a gross discourtesy to the House, and the Leader of the House should have come to the Dispatch Box and made an announcement.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am not expecting a baby any time soon, but I have great sympathy for my colleagues on both sides of the House and fathers who are expecting. Would it be helpful to reassure colleagues that this House stands firmly behind expectant mothers and mothers who take leave from the House that they are not in dereliction of their duty and that no female Member should be traduced in this way? Would it also be helpful to confirm that the pairing system is alive and well and working, so that even if this excellent

recommendation is not passed into the Standing Orders, people who are expecting babies or have to take maternity or paternity leave will be paired by our Whips Offices?

Mr Speaker: The Leader of the House has arrived; we are grateful to her.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I was in a position 25 years ago where I was told by the Chief Whip, "I'd be very happy for you to be there when your daughter is born, but be here on Monday night because we've got an important vote on Maastricht." The birth of my child was therefore going to determine whether I was breaking the whip or not. Pairing is not satisfactory in those circumstances. We have to have proxy voting.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am a member of the Procedure Committee, and we looked at this issue in great detail. Colleagues have spoken about pairing, but of course, pairing does not apply at the moment to Members from the Scottish National party. May I urge that similar arrangements be made for our SNP colleagues, to allow them to experience the same facility as Opposition or Government Members?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to colleagues for all their points of order. Let me emphasise that I understand completely how very disappointed and, indeed, aggrieved many Members are that the debate that had been scheduled will not now take place today. In fairness, I think it only reasonable to point out that from the Government's point of view, it was a choice between having an extremely truncated debate of less than an hour or choosing not to move the motion. When the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) understandably complains that the debate was summarily withdrawn, he has a point, but the response to that is that of course, there was a motion for a general debate. The motion was to be moved by the Leader of the House, and if a motion is not moved, by definition, the debate cannot take place. I would not want to impugn anyone's motives in this matter.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom)
rose—

Mr Speaker: Of course I will come to the Leader of the House.

I want simply to say at this stage the following. First, this matter has been considered over some period. I want to join the tributes to the excellent and indefatigable Chair of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), whose Committee did treat of this matter in some detail. Indeed, as is not uncommon in relation to procedural matters, the Committee asked me whether I would be willing to give evidence to it, which I did. It is no secret whatsoever that I expressed support for the principle and practice of proxy voting in circumstances where people were enjoying or seeking to enjoy maternity or paternity leave. That was my very firm view. I appreciate that there may be a mixture of views on this matter, but that was my very firm view. [*Interruption.*] What has caused the amusement?

Vicky Ford: The "enjoyment" of maternity leave—it is very hard work, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Perhaps I should have used a more neutral term.

Secondly, I think it is not a secret that the support for this idea is not universal, and it is not specifically a party matter. There are people on both sides of the House—particularly those who are accustomed to operating through the usual channels—whose enthusiasm for the idea of proxy voting is, shall we say, not unalloyed. Whether that has anything to do with the way events have transpired today, I have no way of knowing. To be fair, the Home Secretary's statement was very important, and that statement did have to be made. The Home Secretary was earlier, as he said, chairing Cobra and could not make his statement until he got here.

The Government's rationale for choosing to have a statement on the industrial strategy is a matter for the Government. The Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), addressed us with his usual charm and courtesy. He displayed no little knowledge of the matters under discussion, and was widely questioned. Whether that statement had to be made today was a judgment for the Government to make.

As people have asked about when the debate might be rescheduled, I would say that I asked the Deputy Chief Whip, who courteously came to the Chair to inform me that the debate would not go ahead today, whether it would soon be rescheduled. He said that the Government would look to reschedule the debate, but that it would have to be done by agreement through the usual channels.

My own very firm view, having heard what colleagues have said, is that the debate, preferably on a substantive motion—to go back to the point made by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope)—so that the House can decide whether to proceed with proxy voting, should take place before the summer recess. It would be perfectly possible for that to happen, but it is for others to determine whether it shall. It would be my preference, but it is not to be decided by the Chair.

The Leader has come into the Chamber, and we appreciate that. She has also signalled that she wants to say something on this matter, and I think it is important that we hear from her.

Andrea Leadsom: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. May I say that nobody is more disappointed than I am that we have not been able to carry on with this debate? I have always made absolutely clear my 100% commitment to the vital importance of a secure early bond between parents and their babies. It is something for which I have had an absolute passion for 20 years, so nobody should be in any doubt about that.

I have had a number of meetings with colleagues. In fact, last November, when this issue was first raised with me, I asked the Chairman of the Procedure Committee whether the Committee would be so good as to look into how to provide proxy voting arrangements for baby leave. He was kind enough to do so, and I pay tribute to him and to all members of the Procedure Committee for their very well-considered report.

The purpose of today's debate was to open up the discussion about what would actually be quite a significant change to the conventions of the House. My speech, were I delivering it, would have asked Members open questions about how they believe this could best be handled, whether there are alternatives and, indeed, whether there might be unintended consequences. My intention was to facilitate such a debate.

You are absolutely right, Mr Speaker, that the events in Wiltshire meant that the Home Secretary could not get to the House to make his statement until after the end of Cobra. Unfortunately, that has led to our having insufficient time to air the issues under discussion properly today. It is absolutely my intention to bring back that debate as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the Leader of the House for what she has said. Colleagues, I think we have all put our cards on the table, and we need to leave the issue there for today. However, knowing the perspicacity of my colleagues and the strength of feeling that exists among them—not least the Chairs of the Procedure and the Women and Equalities Committees, to name but two—there is no way on earth that this issue will go away, even if anybody in the House, and I know the Leader of the House does not want it to do so, thought that it could be pushed into the long grass. Thinking that would be a triumph of optimism and self-delusion over reality and common sense, and no one would want knowingly to be guilty of that.

Backbench Business

Transforming Care Programme

Mr Speaker: We now come to the Back-Bench motion on the future of the transforming care programme. I am pleased to say that the Member who is due to move the motion is in the Chamber. This is not a laughing matter, but, sadly, not many Members wish to speak in the debate, so it could finish early. Alternatively, the sheer breadth and depth of the learning of the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), together with his capacity to expatiate with great eloquence on it, could lead to a very full debate.

1.54 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House is concerned at the slow progress made under the Transforming Care programme, which was set up to improve the care and quality of life of children and adults with a learning disability and/or autism who display behaviour that challenges; recognises that a substantial number of people with learning disabilities remain trapped in, and continue to be inappropriately admitted to, Assessment and Treatment Units rather than living with support in the community; is further concerned at the lack of capacity within community services; notes evidence of the neglect, abuse, poor care, and premature deaths of people with learning disabilities; believes that the Transforming Care programme is unlikely to realise the ambitions set out in the Building the Right Support strategy before it ends in March 2019; calls on the Government to establish, prioritise, and adequately resource a successor programme that delivers a shift away from institutional care by investing in community services across education, health and social care; and further calls on the Government to ensure that such a programme is based on lifelong support that protects people's human rights and promotes their independence and wellbeing.

May I thank the Backbench Business Committee for facilitating this important debate? Although the number of Members who have indicated a desire to speak is low, this incredibly important issue deserves to be debated in the House. I thank the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), together with other Members, for joining me in making the application for the debate. I have worked very closely with her on this issue, which we both care very much about.

I thank a number of voluntary sector organisations that have been incredibly helpful in preparing for this debate. I particularly want to mention the Challenging Behaviour Foundation, which is led by the very impressive Viv Cooper, as well as Mencap, the National Autistic Society, the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group and Shared Lives Plus.

It is perhaps sobering that we are debating this issue on the 70th anniversary of the NHS. I say that as someone who is a very strong supporter of the NHS, but for the people we are talking about in this debate, the record has not been a good one. The system has let down too many individuals and too many families. On this very significant day, it is important to recognise that the NHS has a lot of work to do to repair the damage that has been done to so many people, and to treat them properly.

The origins of the transforming care programme lie in the horror of the Winterbourne View scandal, which Members will remember. In that private hospital, people

with learning disabilities and autism were abused and assaulted behind locked doors over a sustained period, and that was only revealed by brave whistleblowers. In the aftermath of that horror, I invited the families of those who had been patients in Winterbourne View to come to the Department of Health—I became a Health Minister in September 2012—to talk to me about their concerns.

I clearly remember a father called Steve Sollars, who talked to me about how he had watched his son become, in his words, increasingly zombie-like as he was pumped full of anti-psychotic drugs. Steve described how he tried to complain to the local authority and the primary care trust, as it was in those days, and said that he was just completely ignored. It really struck home when he said, "I felt guilty that I couldn't do anything for my son." I was left thinking how dreadful it was that we had got to a position in which state agencies had left an individual—a father—feeling guilty because they were ignoring his pleas for something to be done.

In the following months and years, I met some other parents of individuals trapped in hospital—sometimes in unattractive institutions—for long periods, all of whom felt that no one was listening to them. I refer in particular to Phill Wills, who campaigned brilliantly on behalf of his son Josh, who was stuck in a hospital in Birmingham for more than two years. The family live in Cornwall, so they had to make an incredible journey just to maintain contact with their little son.

I also met Shahana Hussein, the aunt of a girl called Fauzia, who was in St Andrew's in Northampton. She talked to me about her fears of how her niece appeared to be trapped there. She was anxious that that might be her life course, and that she would never emerge from that place. I met Lynne McCarrick, whose son Chris had been stuck in Calderstones undergoing inappropriate treatment for a very long time, and Lorna and Sid, the parents of Simone, who is still stuck in hospital nine years after her first admission. For much of that time, she has been a long distance away from home, therefore making it impossible for her parents to visit, which is shocking in this day and age. Many of those families are present for today's debate, and they remain extremely concerned about their loved ones and others who remain trapped in institutions.

The conclusion that I reached at that time, which I still hold, is that individuals' human rights are routinely ignored and breached in serious ways. Someone who is convicted of a criminal offence and then sent to prison—other than the cohort who have received indeterminate sentences—generally knows the date of their release. However, people who go into institutions and their families do not know a release date, and many people stay in those institutions for much of their lives, which is shocking. To put it bluntly, they are treated as second-class citizens. I said that at the time, and I still say it now, because not enough has changed for any of us to be comfortable with the situation.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) on the leadership they have shown by securing this debate through the Backbench Business Committee. The right hon. Gentleman said that this programme came out of the Winterbourne View scandal,

[Luciana Berger]

which was back in 2011. Does he share my concern that we are discussing this issue seven years later in 2018 and yet thousands of people in our country—thousands!—are still in institutional care? It is an absolute disgrace that we find ourselves discussing this issue.

Norman Lamb: I completely agree. That sense of complete injustice and the denial of human rights still exists. Nothing much has changed, which is why the debate is so important, and I share the hon. Lady's view that we should not tolerate this scandal. What makes the situation even worse is that this is not a demand for vast amounts of extra public money; it is about how public money is spent. Our demand is that money is spent in a way that respects people's human rights and gives them the chance of a good, happy life in the community, with the support of care workers, friends and family, rather than being trapped in institutions. It is shocking that the situation for very many people has remained exactly the same as it was all those years ago.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) said, it is shocking that it has taken seven years for us to get even this far. I have noticed that although on the one hand the national health service encourages whistleblowers, on the other hand it sometimes litigates to stop whistleblowers, so there is a contradiction. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if people had taken notice of whistleblowers, some of these things might never have happened?

Norman Lamb: I do agree, and that is another big subject that I will be pursuing further in the light of the Gosport inquiry, which I established when I was a Minister. In that case, brave nurses tried to blow the whistle in 1991, but they were shut down by management and unable to pursue their concerns. More than 456 people lost their lives as a result of the inappropriate prescribing of opioids, and that was because whistleblowers—brave staff members—were not listened to. In every part of our health service, we must ensure that people feel able to speak up and that they have the legal rights to do so.

The outcome of our deliberations in the Department was to establish the transforming care programme, which was published in December 2012. Interestingly, it was pursued as a concordat and an agreed programme of action. It was supported by an amazing array of organisations, all of whose logos appeared in the document, including—critically—NHS England. Every organisation that signed up to the programme committed to

“working together, with individuals and their families—note the phrase “with individuals and their families”—and with the groups that represent them, to deliver real change.” That was in December 2012.

These organisations that had committed “to deliver real change” also stated:

“Our shared objective is to see the health and care system get to grips with past failings by listening to this very vulnerable group of people and their families, meeting their needs and working together to commission the range of support which will enable them to lead fulfilling and safe lives in their communities.”

To put it bluntly, there has been a shameful failure on that commitment to change, which simply has not happened for the majority of people involved.

At that time we were operating in a fog. No data had been collected historically on the numbers of people in beds in institutions, so we had to rely on periodic censuses to find out whether anything was changing. When we conducted a census about 18 months after the start of the programme, it was shocking to discover that there had effectively been no change—it was business as usual. The really disturbing thing was that many private sector organisations were making substantial investments in new facilities and delivering the wrong model of care. Why did those organisations have the confidence to make major million-pound investments in inappropriate care? It seems to me that to justify such investment, they must have had reassurance from somewhere in the system that things would carry on as they were. It was shocking to discover the extent to which it was simply business as usual.

Luciana Berger: I apologise if the right hon. Gentleman is going to come on to this, but I want to reflect on the reports commissioned by NHS England and Sir Stephen Bubb. Back in 2014, Sir Stephen was commissioned to write a report entitled “Winterbourne View – Time for Change”, yet nothing happened in the wake of that report, other than a closure programme that was published back in 2015, on which we have seen little progress. In February 2016, Sir Stephen Bubb published another report entitled “Time for Change – The Challenge Ahead”, which again demanded urgent action. Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern that although those reports were commissioned, there was very little response or action taken?

Norman Lamb: Again, I entirely share the hon. Lady's view. I work closely with Sir Stephen Bubb and we have exactly the same view about this. He and I attended a meeting about a year ago with NHS England to discuss progress, or the lack of it. The hon. Lady is right to say that there is a culture of looking at things again and again, and then doing nothing about the conclusions reached, which is wholly unacceptable.

At that time, three issues stood out, and they involved perverse incentives that acted to prevent change from happening. First—this is extraordinary—the person who was making the critical decision about whether an individual should stay in a bed or be discharged was, and still is, the clinician employed by the provider organisation that makes money out of the person staying in the bed. That total conflict of interest has never been confronted. As Minister, I kept asking NHS England to act to address that issue, but it has not yet been resolved. If a private sector organisation is earning £4,000 or £5,000 every week from someone being in a bed, there is a strong incentive to keep them in that bed. There is also an incentive for public sector organisations that want to maintain their existence, and that conflict of interest has never been confronted.

Secondly, there is a complete failure to invest properly in community provision. This is all about the need to shift resources from institutional care to community support; in other words, shifting money from NHS England to local authorities. The original transforming care concordat made it clear that there should be a

pooling of resources between specialist commissioning, clinical commissioning groups and local authorities. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree said, seven years on we are still waiting for a proper pooling of resources so that the money can actually shift and investment can be made in community resources.

The third insight I had at that time was the most extraordinary and wholly unacceptable exclusion of families and individuals from any decisions that were being made about their care. This, I am afraid, continues today. It is very far from the personalised care that the NHS and the Government say they are committed to. In the light of what I saw as our complete collective failure to deliver that change—this was the thing that caused me most distress as Minister—I decided that we had to come up with new proposals for new legal rights, so that families and individuals could challenge decisions that were being made behind their backs about where they would be cared for and treated.

Shortly before the 2015 general election, we published a Green Paper, I think in March 2015, called, “No Voice Unheard, No Right Ignored”. It has an important title, but I am afraid that those rights and those voices are still unheard and ignored because it has never been implemented. Nothing proposed in the Green Paper has been taken forward by the Government. We now have a review of the Mental Health Act 1983, so there is another opportunity to address the scandalous lack of rights for individuals, but the time it will take before there is any legislation will be very long—I doubt whether it will be in this Parliament—and families will just be left waiting.

At that time I worked with Sara Ryan, a remarkable woman and the mother of Connor Sparrowhawk, known as Laughing Boy. He was a young man in the “care” of Southern Health who lost his life while he was within its institution. He drowned in a bath because of neglect. The Health and Safety Executive had decided not to investigate the case. I intervened and asked it to reconsider. It then decided that it could investigate and eventually, years later, prosecutions and convictions followed. The result of the tragedy that struck that family was that Sara Ryan and an amazing group of people worked together to produce a Bill that would have strengthened the rights of individuals. We worked closely with them in the production of that Green Paper.

Because no progress was being made following the 2015 general election, the Government and NHS England embarked on a new process. In October 2015, they published a document called “Building the Right Support”. The plan was to close between 35% and 50% of in-patient beds and, critically, ensure that local areas developed the right community support by—this is the critical date—March next year. The plan involved the creation of 48 transforming care partnerships covering the whole country. These partnerships between NHS England specialist regional commissioners, local authorities and CCGs were to facilitate the shift of money from NHS England to local authorities, so that people could be cared for in the community.

There was a plan for people who had already been in in-patient care for more than five years at April 2016 to be given a dowry to facilitate their transfer into community support. When campaigners asked how many dowries had been provided, NHS England said it did not know because it did not have any records on that. What kind

of implementation of a national programme is it when we do not even know, and have no way of telling, how many dowries have been delivered? And why was it just for that one cohort of people? Surely every person stuck in a hospital or institution has the right to have the money go with them on their journey back into the community. I want to know from the Government how many dowries have been delivered so far and whether they will become part of the programme in the future.

As I said, the programme ends in March next year, along with other work on learning disabilities which campaigners are concerned will continue—I will come back to that at the end—including the learning disabilities mortality review. There has already been a lot of concern expressed about how the annual report was slipped out the day after the local election at the beginning of May. The report contained pretty shocking findings, with life expectancy falling massively short of the rest of us—for men by about 22 years; for women, by 29 years—without any clear justification. Some 13% of the cohort of people looked at in the mortality review were cases where the person’s health had been adversely affected by delays in care or treatment, gaps in services or organisational dysfunction, neglect or abuse. Those findings are shocking and concerning. The question for the Government, which I will come back to, is what happens with the findings of mortality reviews. We can all express concern when they are published, but unless there is a plan of action to address the failings identified in them then nothing will change.

The nine principles in the “Building the Right Support” document are very good. They are all focused on personalised care and getting people into the community, which we all agree must happen.

Luciana Berger: I normally would not make so many interventions and I hope the right hon. Gentleman is happy to take them—I thank him greatly. I just want to reflect a bit more on the learning disabilities mortality review. The title is quite technical, but it comes back to what he opened his speech with: we are discussing thousands of the most vulnerable people in our country and we have a responsibility to do everything we can to compensate for the fact that they are so vulnerable. The mortality review, launched in May of the previous year, found that one in eight of the deaths reviewed showed there had been abuse, neglect, delays in treatment or gaps in care. Today we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NHS. Is it not a sad reflection that, amidst all the positivity, we need to do something about this issue so urgently?

Norman Lamb: I totally agree. It is, as I said at the start, sobering. In a way, all of us who strongly support the NHS must not laud it as a perfect institution with nothing to complain about. As far as this group of people are concerned, they have been very badly let down. Fundamentally, in many cases they have died early through neglect. That is intolerable in this day and age.

The nine principles, which are positive and empowering, are really good. I sign up to them completely. It is the implementation that is lacking and has largely failed. I say to the Minister that she is very fortunate to be in her wonderful job. My great frustration is that this programme came early in my time as Minister, but I learned, as I did

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the job, just how critically important implementation is. You think that by establishing good principles and getting everyone to agree to implement them those organisations will do what they have committed to do. It was probably naïve to think that. The reality was that nothing changed and it still has not changed. One critically important lesson to learn from that failure is to have a total, obsessive focus on implementation and national leadership.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that to achieve transformation in care, investment needs to be put into alternatives in the community before it is possible to free vulnerable people from these institutions, and that far too often, the public sector tries to make savings before it has made the investment in the things that will achieve the same?

Norman Lamb: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point, and I totally agree. I said at the start that this is not a great demand for a whole load more money. However, some up-front investment is needed, not only in establishing the facilities in the community, but in training people in the community, and I will come back to that in a little while.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I add my voice to others in the Chamber in saying that I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for securing the debate, and I hope to catch the Chair's eye to make a contribution on autism. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that when it comes to financing and co-ordination, a lot can be learnt from the National Audit Office report from 2017 that looked specifically at progress in the transforming care programme? Does he also agree that it is quite worrying that the NAO said that it was concerned about the programme's overall progress and whether it would achieve value for money? One of the problems that it pointed out was that some of the local partnerships were

"struggling to put in place appropriate accommodation quickly enough",

which had led to delays in people coming out of hospital and perhaps not the correct co-ordination to provide the services that are so desperately required by this vulnerable group of people.

Norman Lamb: I thank the right hon. Lady for her intervention, although it was a bit freaky, because I was about to come on to the National Audit Office report. She is absolutely right in identifying the criticism that it made of progress on this programme.

Let me deal with the numbers involved. As I said, the commitment was to close between 35% and 50% of in-patient learning disability and autism beds and to provide alternative arrangements in the community by March next year. The document, "Building the Right Support", mentioned getting 2,600 beds down to between 1,300 and 1,700 beds, which is a very significant drop. Hitting the minimum drop that the Government committed to of 35% would involve the closure of 922 beds. Of that total, 531 still need to be closed in what is now a very short space of time.

The latest data, from the end of May, shows that there are still 2,400 people in institutions, 41% of whom are over 50 km away from home. I ask hon. Members to think about what that means. Many of those families are not wealthy, and some people are themselves disabled. If their loved one—their child—is put in an institution a long way from home, it can sometimes be impossible to maintain contact. Just imagine—all of us—what that must mean to people to lose touch with their vulnerable child. It is not acceptable, but it persists today, and according to that latest data from the end of May, the length of stay is still over five years. There has been very little change in the length of stay. Perhaps most troubling of all from that latest data is that the number of children in in-patient beds has more than doubled. For goodness' sake, this programme is about moving away from institutional care, yet between March 2015 and May 2018, we have doubled the number of children in institutions. This is intolerable and in a little while, I will come back to why that is not necessary if things are done properly.

I find myself in a horrible position of expressing anxiety about closing the rest of those beds by March next year, but it is important for the Minister to note that there is a real fear on the part of families and the organisations that represent them about a big risk in a head-long dash to close beds by the deadline in cases where many people have complex needs. Some people in units that have been earmarked either for closure or reductions in beds, apparently defined as "impacted sites" in the system, will not be going home but will have to be shunted somewhere else in the country. Of course, a move for someone who has very complex needs can be massively destabilising. If this is done in a hurry to meet a target because there has been a failure of the programme to date to prepare community resources, it will be a disaster for the individuals involved. For those able to live in the community who are still in institutional care, there is a massive concern that not enough has been done to develop community services or train the workforce. We have to avoid the risk of discharging people only to readmit them weeks or months later.

I mention the really shocking case of a young lad called Eden. He has been failed throughout his life, from childhood into adulthood. He has been in hospital for more than 10 years. His mother, Deb, is desperate. She constantly fights against the system, which does not listen to her. He is in a hospital in Norfolk, and they live in London. She has long journeys—a 10-hour round trip or something of that sort—to visit him. She is not wealthy. Eventually—I visited Eden in that hospital—she got him home to a facility near their home in west London, but because arrangements had not been made properly by the local authority to have the proper support services in place, within weeks he was back in that institution again. That individual has been horribly failed by the NHS—by the system—and it is wholly unacceptable.

The consequences of the failure to get people out of institutions include, as I said, the loss of contact with family. Care behind closed doors often involves unacceptable practices, hidden from view. I mentioned Fauzia earlier, who was admitted to St Andrew's hospital in Northampton—she was a child of 15 at the time. Her family asked me to go and visit her. It is an unusual thing for a Minister to do, but I decided to go at the

invitation not of the institution, but of the family. I went to see her and she was living in what I would describe as “a cell”. This is a 15-year-old girl. She suffered from the constant use of force—restraint—and she was being put into seclusion in another room that was completely bare, with concrete walls. She had a tiny exercise yard. This girl was in there for over two years. It was really shocking—a total abuse of her human rights. She had no life at all, yet from the day that she was discharged, when we finally got a review undertaken, there has been no more restraint. She went to a brilliant place called Alderwood, also in Northamptonshire. The people who work there have never had to use restraint against her, because they have been trained, crucially—the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) will know about this—in how autism affects the individual, which so often does not happen in big institutions.

I visited Fauzia at Alderwood. She has a very happy life. She is outdoors much of the time, happy and contented—still very complex, but not in the horribly alien environment that she was in in St Andrew’s. St Andrew’s is receiving a fortune in Government money—taxpayers’ money—in many cases to treat people using the wrong model of care, trapping them in this institution. It has invested in a very substantial new unit. It may be smart—I am told that it is—but why are we making this investment in new in-patient facilities when children should not be going into hospital, unless there is an absolutely exceptional circumstance?

I also visited Josh, who I mentioned earlier. He had been in a hospital in Birmingham that had cared for him well, but he was far away from home. He has now made a substantial improvement and is developing brilliantly. He has a life again, and he is happy with his family. It is inspiring to see what people are doing to support individuals in those community settings.

What have the Government done to assess the progress of this programme? The Department of Health commissioned an independent review of transforming care partnerships, allocated £1 million to it and put it out to tender, but I am told that it has now been pulled and will not go ahead. Why? I understand that it might be because NHS England is also, bizarrely, commissioning an independent review, but we have only had provisional results from that. When will we know more? Those provisional results are disturbing. They show that, in quarter 3 of 2017-18, only 35 of the 48 transforming care partnerships had intensive support services to look after adults 24/7 in their own homes across the whole area of the partnership. Those services are required by the Government’s document, and they are critical to ensuring that people can be safe at home, yet only 35 out of 48 partnerships have them in place.

Only 23—less than half—of the partnerships had intensive support services for children and young people, so it is little wonder that we have seen a doubling of the number of children going into institutions. Only 19 had adult community forensics services across the whole area, and only 14 had children and young people’s community forensics services across the area. There is no detail at all yet about what the services that are in place actually consist of. All we have is a tick-box exercise to show whether there is a service in place. As the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin) rightly

identified, there is so much missing from community support that would enable people to be safely discharged and return home.

The National Audit Office report, to which the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham referred, made a pretty damning assessment in 2017. It questioned the credibility of the transforming care partnership plans and highlighted the fact that care and treatment reviews were not taking place as promised. Those reviews are supposed to be carried out for every individual in in-patient care every six months, yet, as of May this year, only 54% had had one in the past six months, and 390 patients—16% of the total—had not had one for more than a year. Why not? If the programme is being properly implemented, with proper national leadership, surely those reviews should happen in every case, every six months.

The NAO made the case that money was not transferring quickly enough from hospitals to the community and that there was still no effective mechanism to guarantee that that would happen. It identified an absence of workforce plans for community provision and found that most transforming care partnerships did not intend to produce such plans until 2019. Well, how the hell are they going to meet the target of this dramatic reduction in beds by March 2019 if they do not produce workforce plans until that time? That is completely the wrong way round.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I happen to agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Does he expect the Minister to be able to tell us what has happened to the extra £2 billion of investment that the Government have made in social care services since March last year? It seems to me that something is not quite right about the co-ordination in this area, because the money is going in but the outcomes are not coming out at the other end.

Norman Lamb: I agree, and I suspect that the social care system as a whole is under considerable strain. The Government have chosen to produce a Green Paper only on the older people element of social care. They are not looking at the position of younger adults with disability. The right hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that we are not seeing the outcomes that we absolutely need to see.

Importantly, the NAO focused on the proportion of people with learning disabilities who are in paid employment. We need to take a holistic view. This is not just about whether someone is in a hospital bed or in the community. We need to empower people, as far as possible, to live the kind of lives that the rest of us take for granted. The report highlights the fact that only 5.8% of people with a learning disability are in paid employment. However, some local authorities have up to 20% employment rates in that area, which shows what is possible. [*Interruption.*] Madam Deputy Speaker, I am moving towards the end of my speech. I heard a cough, and I note the point that you are trying to make.

Before I finish, however, I want to highlight the fact that there are good things going on. I want to ask the Minister a number of questions. Some areas of the country do this really well. They include Salford, Hertfordshire, Ealing and Bristol, and there is a brilliant community service in my own county of Norfolk, which is run by an immensely inspiring woman called Melanie Bruce. She previously worked in institutions, but now

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takes the view that very few children ever need to go into hospital and that, if they do need to do so, it should be for only a very short time. The community service is called Starfish, and I have written to Simon Stevens saying that that model should be applied everywhere. In the past year, among the group of people in the Starfish programme, there has not been a single admission to hospital. That shows what is possible, rather than the doubling of the numbers that we are seeing elsewhere. I also want to mention Shared Lives Plus, a scheme in which someone with a learning disability or with mental ill health goes to live in a family. The families are paid for the support that they give, but the scheme treats the person as a human being and an equal citizen, rather than putting them in an institution. That is what is so important.

I will end by asking the Minister some questions. What will happen after March 2019? Will she commit to an improved successor programme that learns lessons from the last seven years and actually fulfils the promise of the transforming care programme, with a focus on implementation and inspiring effective national leadership? Will she confirm that those other programmes in NHS England, which are vital for people with learning disability, will continue and that the same national focus will be maintained or indeed enhanced? What assurances can she give that this programme of work will continue as an absolute priority beyond March next year?

Given the slow progress to date on closing beds and the stated plan to close 922 beds by March, what evidence does the Minister have that new community support is available to support the safe discharge of those people? Can she guarantee that there will be a close focus on every single case, to avoid the risk of neglect? Will the Government establish a new workforce development fund to ensure that there are enough staff with the skills to deliver the right care in the community?

What actions will the Minister take to guarantee the pooling of money and the shift of resource from hospitals to the community? Will she address the conflict of interest of clinicians making decisions when they are employed by organisations that earn their money from keeping beds occupied? How will the Government ensure that all in-patients receive a care and treatment review every six months, instead of the failure of delivery that we have at the moment? What steps are the Government taking to improve data on in-patient numbers so that we can bring to an end the two unreconciled data sets that we still have, years on from when the NAO complained about this in the first place?

How will the Minister ensure that progress is robustly and independently monitored and scrutinised? When will the independent evaluation be published in full? How do the Government intend to learn from the areas of really good practice to deliver an approach based on early intervention and crisis prevention? Will she ensure that, from here on, children will be central to the Government's programme? If we can prevent children from going into institutions in the first place, we can change their lives completely. We can rescue them from a life in an institution.

Finally, will the Minister discuss with the Prime Minister the case for a cross-departmental ministerial taskforce to drive progress and show that all parts of

Government are doing their bit to meet people's full range of needs, given the importance not only of where they are but of employment, housing, education and the criminal justice system? This is a story of the awful neglect of people's human rights, and of people in this country here and now being treated as second-class citizens. This really does have to end, and we owe it to the families sitting in the Public Gallery today and their loved ones to do far better by them in the future.

2.39 pm

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Once again, I congratulate the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing this debate, but I regret that more of our colleagues are not in the Chamber for what I consider to be a very important debate.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman and the House will forgive me if I come at this purely from the angle of autism, but, having the privilege of chairing the all-party group on autism, I tend to refer to it on every occasion, as many of my colleagues know. I have just come from a lunchtime event in the other place with the Baroness Browning, Angela Browning, who entered the House in the same year as I did and who was the original inspiration behind the Autism Act 2009, a private Member's Bill that I took through the House. She was entertaining a group of people from an organisation called Fixers. I appreciate that we are not allowed prompts in the Chamber, but its report, "Feel Happy on the Spectrum: Young Autistic People Speak Out", has already left an impression on me. Two very impressive young people, Jenny and Gabriel, talked us through their experiences.

As the right hon. Gentleman talked about employment, I had a look at the recommendations in the report, and of course they include something we would all like to see: more education on autism in the workplace. It contains testimony that I thought would be interesting to read into the record from a young person who has obviously found an employer who is understanding and welcoming of their autism. They wrote:

"Civil Service fast-stream is really good for people with autism. They go out of their way to accommodate your autism in their entrance exams with things like extra time and they don't discriminate if you disclose".

That is a positive note on which to start my remarks in a debate that is partly a reflection of the very sad and disturbing stories that came out of Winterbourne View care home. The transforming care programme was developed in response to that atrocious scandal. No one could have failed to be moved by the shocking abuse of adults with learning disabilities and autism in that private hospital, which was supposed to be an assessment and treatment unit—it most certainly was not a treatment unit; it was a maltreatment unit. Following that, the Government committed to moving about 3,000 adults with learning disabilities and autism out of in-patient settings and into community-based support by next April.

Although we have seen a small reduction in the number of people in in-patient settings, about 2,500 people are still in hospital, as the right hon. Gentleman said. Some 10% of those patients are under 18—that number has more than doubled since 2015; 61% have been in hospital for over two years and some, sadly, for over 10 years; and 46% have not had a care treatment review in the

past six months, as mandated. As he also told us, and as I also understand from an excellent organisation called Dimensions, which provides personalised social care services to people with learning disabilities and autism, more than 22% of people are placed more than 100 km from home. So although there has been a reduction in the number of people living in hospital and some real success in moving people into community support, too many people are still being admitted or readmitted to hospital, and there remain obstacles to moving some of the original cohort considered under the programme into real homes.

The success of the programme relies on the right support being available in the community to prevent people from being admitted in the first place or to help them move out of hospital. The number of autistic people recorded in in-patient units has increased by over a third in the three years since data collection began in March 2015. That is a phenomenal increase. According to the latest figures, almost 48% of people covered by the transforming care programme are in fact autistic. While some of this increase may be put down to better identification of autism, it still displays a concerning over-reliance on hospitals rather than homes. Put simply, if transforming care does not work for autistic people, I am afraid that it will not work. If the programme is to continue, all mental health staff will require better training on and understanding of autism and the right community support will have to be made available.

It is crucial that we hear from the Minister what plans there are beyond March 2019 to ensure that any progress made is not lost and that there is a focus on areas where better progress needs to be made, specifically in supporting autistic people.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am sorry I was not here earlier, but I was in a one-hour Westminster Hall debate. I commend the right hon. Lady for the hard work she does on autism across the United Kingdom. As she will know, Northern Ireland has an autism strategy that leads the United Kingdom. It is similar to the programme in Wales, but we are leading the way. Will she kindly suggest to the Minister that the Government look at the plan in Northern Ireland, along with the one in Wales, as a good way of proceeding?

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Yes, it is very important that we look at what arrangements the devolved countries make for people with autism. Certainly a few years ago, Wales was well in advance with its plans for autism, which I found most commendable, but I think it now needs to revisit and update its plans, because none of these plans must be left to one side; they need to be constantly reviewed and updated.

I am pleased that next year we will have the opportunity to conduct a 10-year review of the Autism Act. I hope the right hon. Gentleman will contribute to the work that many Members are doing on both sides of the House in various areas, from education to employment, healthcare and even the over-representation of people with autism in the criminal justice system, so that we can put down a marker for the Government after 10 years on what progress has been made and how much further we have to go. If the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) would be good enough to send me a link to

the plans in Northern Ireland, or point me in the right direction, I am sure they will be taken into consideration as we carry out the review.

I am pleased to see the Minister in her place, as she obviously has a lead role, but I think that all relevant Departments need to play their part. I still have a feeling that we need a cross-departmental ministerial taskforce to cover the areas that I have just been highlighting, such as health, education, housing, and justice, all of which we will include in the APPG's summary and presentation to the Government next year. Let me put down a marker for the Government. I want to know what plans the Minister has for the future of transforming care, whether she will establish that cross-departmental taskforce to lead the process, and what steps she will take to reduce the number of admissions of autistic people and improve the community services that should support them.

I work closely with many autism charities, and in particular with the National Autistic Society. Alongside Mencap and the Challenging Behaviour Foundation, it has been leading research on the experience of families who have been affected by the transforming care programme. It wanted to look into exactly how relatives came to be in mental health hospitals, and what was getting in the way of their being discharged back into the community. I commend to the Minister the report "Transforming Care: our stories". It contains the very powerful stories of 13 families, and I think that she will find it very useful, if she or her officials have not yet been able to read it.

The report found that, despite the existence of a national programme, five areas needed real focus to make the programme successful. The first is "Making sure the right services are available in the community". I think we have covered that. The second is involving and listening to individual families, and helping them to be heard through advocacy if necessary. The third is improving the quality of in-patient care. The fourth is "Making plans for discharge and sticking to them".

The fifth is providing specialist support from trained and understanding staff. For me, that last one is key. When we have met someone with autism, we have met just one person with autism. Everyone is different. Staff really need to understand that, and to be trained to understand people with autism.

Sandy Martin: Does the right hon. Lady agree that one of the most important aspects of support for the families of children and young people with autism is the availability of respite care, to enable them to cope with the very great additional duties that they have?

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Absolutely. I know from my constituency casework—as, I think, will every MP—that providing a safe home and a safe environment for a family member who has autism can be a very intense, demanding and challenging process, and respite care plays an important part in giving family members a breathing space.

The report includes some remarks from someone called Anna, the mother of Catherine, who is autistic and has a learning disability and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

"Anna told us, 'she's not getting any treatment, it's just a holding pen because staff [in the unit] don't have the right skills, expertise or mindset...Everything is about seclusion, never about trying to prevent incidents happening in the first place.'" That demonstrates to me that there is a lack of training, and that much more emphasis should be put on that.

[*Dame Cheryl Gillan*]

The report goes on to outline recommendations made from people and organisations at every level, from individual professionals to NHS England and the Government. In particular, it suggests that a cultural shift is needed to ensure that individuals and their families are listened to in a way that can reduce the number of adversarial relationships that sometimes arise. The importance of a good understanding of both autism and learning disabilities, as a comorbidity, should be emphasised more than it is at present.

One of the parents of an autistic man with mental health problems said:

““Stephen just falls between the gaps and no one takes ultimate responsibility for his case... Where is the pressure to get Stephen back into the community?”

That is a cry for help from a father who wants to see his son go out into the community and have the quality of life that everyone deserves to be able to achieve.

The report also highlights a lack of accountability throughout the system, particularly when it comes to meeting the needs of autistic people. At a national level, in NHS England, leadership for autism falls into the gap between established learning disability and mental health teams. The appointment of a new strategy lead for autism in NHS England is considered to be a very positive step, but I need to be reassured that, in the future, NHS England will focus on the needs of autistic people in order to meet the Government’s requirement for a reduction in their health inequality, which is a commitment in the NHS mandate. I hope that the Minister will tell us what steps she will take to ensure that NHS England allocates appropriate resources to the needs of autistic people, and to ensure that the issues set out in “Transforming Care: our stories”—I am going to give her a copy—are addressed.

Autism charities regularly hear that autistic people struggle to find mental health support that meets their needs, and in the worst cases, if this is not available, people hit crisis and are admitted to hospital. Traditional mental health interventions might need changing, for example by using clear, non-metaphorical language or communicating with someone who does not speak. That, again, requires a good understanding of autism.

In 2016 NHS England published its mental health “Five Year Forward View” outlining how it plans to improve mental health services in England. It includes a number of proposals for new care pathways to help people access the right support and, importantly, it proposes a care pathway for autism. Work on designing this pathway is due to start this year, but I have not seen any detail on what it will include. It is vital that it covers the following for children, young people and adults on the autism spectrum: timely access to autism diagnosis, autism training for all mental health staff, and the ability to make reasonable adjustments for mental health treatments so that if autistic people need mental health support, they can get the right help from services. I hope that the Minister will also address how the autism care pathway will be developed and that it will cover diagnosis, access to tailored mental health support and autism training.

Another contributory factor to the number of autistic people in mental health hospitals is the inclusion of autism in the Mental Health Act 1983 definition of

mental disorder, meaning that autistic people can be sectioned without a diagnosed mental health problem. The independent review of the Mental Health Act is very important and has been welcomed by the autism charities. They believe it is important to create a legal regime around mental health support that properly meets the needs of autistic people and their families. The status quo fails to do this, and that has resulted in autistic people being inappropriately detained under the Act and far too often subjected to damaging over-medication. The NHS digital data show that autistic people are not benefiting entirely from the NHS England transforming care programme, because the in-patient numbers are failing to meaningfully reduce and in some cases are rising. The review’s interim report has identified this definition of autism as a mental disorder as a key question to be addressed in the final report, and I strongly urge that the review must address the inequality for autistic people at the heart of the Mental Health Act. I hope the Minister addresses that in her closing remarks.

I have spoken for some time, and I hope I have added to the debate initiated by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk, although I appreciate that I have, inevitably, repeated some of the points he made. In conclusion, I go back to something I said earlier about the transforming care programme that I think summarises the situation. Put simply, if transforming care does not work for autistic people, it will not work. We want transforming care to work; we want it to succeed. It has made a start: it is not an all-good start, but it is not an all-bad start. The Minister and the Government have a golden opportunity to turn what is a visionary programme into something that can reflect the success of the care with which we look after people in our community with learning disabilities and autism. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s response.

2.58 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for the debate and to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) for securing it. I am also grateful for his commitment to this issue over many years. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan). I am grateful, too, for her deep commitment to, and knowledge of, the subject of autism.

The treatment of residents at Winterbourne View was a national disgrace. That any human being should be subjected to such terrifying physical and emotional abuse in their own home setting is utterly abhorrent, and that those people should be among the most vulnerable and least able to speak out or defend themselves simply defies belief. The way in which we treat our most vulnerable residents is a mark of our civilisation, and Winterbourne View was a failure of the most basic measure of human decency. It was therefore absolutely right that the public outcry that followed Winterbourne View led to a firm commitment from the Government and to the transforming care programme.

However, the transforming care programme has failed to live up to its name. It has not substantially transformed the care and support that many people with autism and/or a learning disability are receiving. There are still far too many people living in hospitals such as

Winterbourne View instead of homes. There are still far too many examples of families who have to fight each week to ensure their relatives' safety and security, and even the basics of care, and too many people are still not receiving the support they need to live healthy, secure and fulfilled lives. We are now eight months away from the end of the transforming care programme and urgent action is needed to deliver a genuine transformation in the quality of care for thousands of people living with learning disability and autism in the UK.

In December 2012, 3,400 people were in NHS-funded learning disability in-patient beds, with around 1,200 in assessment and treatment units. The original Department of Health report following Winterbourne View found that the main reason for referral was the management of a crisis, suggesting that the failure in service provision had often started long before the person was admitted to hospital. The failure often involved a lack of support in other areas of health, social care and education provision, often leading to behaviour and mental health deteriorating over time and then reaching a crisis point. The report's conclusion suggested six key changes, and I want to restate them because, in the experience of too many of my constituents, those changes have not yet been implemented or become a reality.

The first recommendation was that the information made available by councils, health bodies and care providers should be transparent and of good quality. The second was that community-based mental health services should offer assertive outreach, 24-hour crisis resolution and general support. The third recommendation was that small-scale residential care should be available to those in greatest need. The fourth was that employment or daytime activities should be offered. The fifth was that health and social care commissioners should start to plan from day one of admission to in-patient services for the move back to the community. The final recommendation was that the Care Quality Commission should monitor whether services are meeting essential standards, take enforcement action if a provider is not compliant, and monitor the operation of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Those recommendations bring me to the case of my constituent Matthew Garnett. Matthew's mother Isabelle is in the Public Gallery today, and I am grateful to the Minister for taking the time to meet me and Isabelle recently. I have spoken of Matthew's situation in the Chamber several times, but I make no apologies for raising it again today because his case illustrates exactly how little progress has been made in implementing the Department of Health's original recommendations in response to Winterbourne View.

Matthew is approaching his 18th birthday. He is a tall young man whose absolute passion is football, particularly Liverpool FC. Matthew has autism. I first met Matthew's mum at the start of 2016 when she came to my surgery following a deterioration in Matthew's mental health and behaviour at home. Matthew had been admitted to a mental health unit under section. At that time, Matthew's parents were concerned that the assessment unit that he was in had no specialism in autism and that he had been there for far too long without appropriate clinical support. They had been recommended a hospital in Northampton, St Andrew's, as a place with the right expertise for Matthew to be able to get well and come home.

I supported their battle to get access to a bed for Matthew at St Andrew's, and we celebrated when he was allocated a bed.

After Matthew had been at St Andrew's for just a few weeks, his parents came to see me again. They were concerned that Matthew seemed to be taking part in very few activities, that he was losing weight, that he had become more withdrawn and that they had noticed signs of anxiety in his behaviour. They were concerned that there was no discharge plan and that staff seemed reluctant even to talk about one. Matthew's situation deteriorated rapidly at St Andrew's. He suffered a broken wrist and bruising. His parents found excrement in his shoes. He lost a catastrophic amount of weight. His parents became gravely concerned that he would die, so we fought again. They found alternative community-based provision not far from the hospital. They contacted Alderwood, which the right hon. Member for North Norfolk has already mentioned, and discovered that it had a place for Matthew, so he moved in.

Matthew is now flourishing. He volunteers at the local football club and in the village where his home is located. He takes part in a wide range of activities—from film nights to canoeing and trips to the seaside—and he is able to play and watch lots of football. Matthew is well and living life to the full. The care and support he is receiving costs considerably less than the £12,000 a week spent by the NHS on a private hospital bed in which his health was deteriorating and from which there was no plan to discharge him.

Norman Lamb: The hon. Lady is making a powerful case. Does she agree that the Care Quality Commission should do far more to challenge how these units often define themselves as specialist units? The care given to Matthew and Fouzia at St Andrew's in Northampton was very far from specialist; it was inappropriate and it damaged them massively.

Helen Hayes: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I also visited St Andrew's and, when I returned, I looked at how it was advertising its services and compared that with what I saw. I would go so far as to say that, in any consumer environment, a good case could be made that St Andrew's was contravening the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 in how it was advertising itself, given the expertise the staff actually had in relation to autism. In my view, that is certainly a matter for the CQC.

Matthew's case is important, because it demonstrates clearly that all the failures that led to Winterbourne View are still possible. Matthew's family did not receive the support they needed for Matthew at any stage prior to his admission to hospital. It was that lack of support that led to his behaviour deteriorating in the first place. There was no assertive outreach or 24-hour crisis resolution support; there was just the local police force when things got too much. That was four years after the Department of Health report on Winterbourne View.

The small-scale residential setting in which Matthew is now living is brilliant, but there is far too little of that type of provision and none of it close to home. Matthew's parents live in my south London constituency, and Matthew is currently living in Northamptonshire. I met the providers of his care at Alderwood, and they told me that what they provide is easily scalable. It is about

[Helen Hayes]

training staff in effective communication techniques, paying staff properly and providing a good career structure so that providers can retain a stable team, and being able to access funding for the places they provide. It is not rocket science. It just needs a proper commitment to invest in settings that deliver the best possible care.

At St Andrew's, Matthew was not participating in any meaningful activities on a day-to-day basis; the emphasis was on managing and containing his behaviour through medication rather than engaging him in recovery. In his new home at Alderwood, Matthew is on very low levels of medication. He takes part in meaningful activities that add value to his life and make a real contribution to his community on a daily basis.

There was no discharge planning while Matthew was at St Andrew's. In fact, his parents were told they were being far too optimistic even to raise discharge with his clinicians. St Andrew's is a private hospital that is largely funded by the NHS. The Government must look seriously and urgently at the perverse incentives at work in a system that is so reliant on the private sector because of the lack of NHS provision. Private hospitals currently have no incentive to discharge when they are being paid a rate of £12,000 a week by the NHS.

There was very little scrutiny of the effectiveness of the treatment Matthew was receiving in return for such large amounts of NHS funding, and no regard was given to the concerns of his family, who had to fight to get a second opinion, which was itself dismissed by staff at St Andrew's.

Transforming care can never be fully implemented while such perverse incentives apply and while profit-making organisations are relied on to substitute for a lack of proper funding for NHS and social care provision. Private hospitals too often remain holding pens for patients, rather than the secure and supported homes that they need. No learning disabled or autistic person should be living in a hospital for the long term. We need homes not hospitals.

Too many of my constituents whose family members, including children, have a learning disability and/or autism still tell me that when they express concerns about the care their loved one is receiving, their views are not taken seriously and they have to battle to have their concerns addressed. Again, we cannot begin to see a system that delivers the care that vulnerable people need without proper processes for accountability through which family members can raise concerns.

I am concerned about the Government's tracking of the progress of the implementation of transforming care. In response to a written question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), the Minister for Care highlighted, in her answer on 4 June, the plan to decommission 900 beds in mental health hospitals. Assuring transformation data provides figures on the number of people with learning disabilities and/or autism admitted and discharged. In the 2017-18 period, there were 330 more discharges than admissions, but it should be noted that that applies not to individual people, but to the individual instance of an admission or discharge, so there is no way to tell to what extent some people are caught in a revolving door. The dataset does not directly identify whether an admission is from the community or a transfer from

another hospital setting. Similarly, the data does not directly identify whether the end of an episode of care is a discharge to the community or a transfer to another hospital setting. Thus, although 330 discharges might sound like progress, the Department of Health and Social Care has not so far provided figures for individual cases. In the light of the target of closing 900 beds, this cannot be seen in any way as a victory for either the Government or, more importantly, those vulnerable individuals whom transforming care is intended to safeguard.

I am also concerned that the Government's focus for the final few months of transforming care is far too much on hospital bed closures. Bed closures should be a consequence of the provision of properly funded, high-quality community settings, and the by-product of achieving better outcomes for people currently in long-term hospital provision. Instead, the Government continually refer to bed closures as the headline target and measure for transforming care. Without high-quality, properly resourced alternative provision, bed closures, in themselves, will simply result in further pressures on the NHS, as people who are discharged without sufficient support will end up readmitted, via A&E, to a situation where fewer in-patient beds are available. It is almost impossible to find any meaningful data on the funding and level of community provision for people with autism and learning disabilities, and I urge the Government to switch their focus from bed closures to community provision for the final eight months of transforming care in its current form.

I also want to highlight the regulatory gap that still exists. A constituent contacted me recently on behalf of her brother, who is an adult with autism living in a supported housing provision, paid for through his personal budget. He needs a high level of support and his personal budget is considerable, but his sister has raised concerns about his treatment in the community provision over a period of months. The provision involves a high level of care, but is technically supported housing, which means that it is not regulated by the CQC. The recent report by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee on supported housing highlighted this gap in regulation and called on the Government to take action to address it, and I want to do so again today. There is great urgency that we make progress on transforming care, but discharging vulnerable people from hospital into settings that are not regulated creates a risk that they will be failed yet again.

Finally, I wish to highlight the wider gap in awareness and support, particularly in the area of autism. In schools and in the NHS, the experience of far too many of my constituents is that the support needed so that autistic people, particularly children, are able to thrive is simply not there. This continued failure to properly equip teachers and healthcare professionals to understand autism and the support that their students and patients need has long-term consequences through an increased level of care that people need later in life and an increased likelihood of crisis. I urge the Minister to work with her colleagues, particularly those in the Department for Education, to accelerate and bring forward training in autism for teachers, and not just new teachers coming through the education system now

but existing teachers who are working day in, day out, without the knowledge that they need to serve autistic students well.

There is no way around the fact that the transforming care programme has failed significantly to date. We need a renewed focus on care and support for people with learning disabilities and autism. In every community throughout the country they should be living well, close to family and friends and properly supported, not locked away receiving over-medicalised care, with no one monitoring how effective that care is or what the public purse receives by way of high-quality provision in return for the expenditure. We need homes not hospitals, and we need everybody living with autism and a learning disability in this country to be able to live life to the full, with dignity, in community settings that are close to home.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call Ronnie Cowan.

3.15 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker; it was like Hobson's choice there, but I eventually got to my feet.

I thank the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) for securing this important debate. I echo the sentiments of the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) about there being lamentably few Members present to take part; it makes my job of summarising the debate a lot easier, but I am sure that all 650 MPs have constituency cases relating to the issues we are discussing.

The right hon. Member for North Norfolk correctly pointed out in his opening remarks that the input from charitable organisations in the sector is absolutely paramount. Where would we be without the organisations that turn out in numbers to raise money for and give help and support to people in care throughout our society? Their commitment and support of the caring community is quite extraordinary. He also brought a humane touch to the debate, detailing some distressing individual cases, and highlighted the risk that individuals can be trapped in the very system that is supposed to be there to aid them.

The right hon. Gentleman also encouraged whistle-blowers, saying that they should be listened to and not shut down. He offered strong support for the nine principles on getting the right support, describing them as positive and empowering, but unfortunately had to lament the fact that they have not actually been implemented yet. He spoke passionately about keeping children out of institutions and hospitals wherever possible and caring for them in our communities.

Once again, the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham educated the House on matters regarding autism, and she has no need to apologise for that. Several organisations in Inverclyde, my constituency, support children and young adults across the spectrum, and at least two of them were started because parents could not find the help and support for their loved ones that they were looking for. They got up and did it themselves. The right hon. Lady expressed concern that there is still an overriding reliance on hospital care and spoke about the need for a cross-departmental taskforce,

because the issues cover a range of Departments. She also highlighted how inappropriate it is to detain people with autism under the Mental Health Act 1983.

The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) was highly critical of the transforming care programme and expressed concerns that many people with learning disabilities and autism are not properly supported. She forensically analysed the case of Matthew Garnett, thereby identifying the failings in the system. That was a timely reminder that behind the statistics are individuals and their families. Thankfully, Matthew is now flourishing at Alderwood, and it is notable that the care there costs less than institutional care.

I have absolutely no desire whatsoever to turn this speech into a party political broadcast but, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, there are examples out there from throughout the United Kingdom that can be learned from, and I hope that the UK Government will look to improve the care that they provide.

I am proud to be a member of the Scottish National party. In our 2016 manifesto, we made the following pledge:

“Our services will be designed to support people living longer, often with complex conditions. Our aim is to deliver care as close to home as possible. We will build on health and social care integration by ensuring that our NHS develops as a Community Health Service.”

The Scottish Government are continuing to work on and review our strategy, and that is key: we have to work on and review our strategies; we cannot sit back on our laurels at any point and decide that we have this matter under control. It is about learning and re-learning as we go forward.

The Keys to Life, published in 2013, is a 10-year strategy, with a focus on health issues, to improve the quality of life for people with learning disabilities. With £7.7 million of investment, we are improving learning disability services in Scotland. The strategy's implementation plan sets out four strategic outcomes: a healthy life; choice and control; independence; and active citizenship. The delivery of the strategy is being taken forward with a wide range of partners in the statutory and third sectors, and is focused on phased priorities targeted at each of the four outcomes. The Scottish Government have been working since 2017 on reviewing progress and identifying priorities for the next phase of implementation. Reducing the stark health inequalities that people with learning disabilities face is a key priority within the strategy. Without good health, people with learning disabilities are unable to contribute to, or participate in, their communities.

Ultimately, sometimes these things do come down to money. There will never be a time when we look at the healthcare that we are provided with and say, “Well, that's good enough.” We always want better for our friends, our family and our loved ones. The Scottish Government are committed to the twin approach of investment and reform in our national health and care services. In 2018-19, the health resource budget will increase by more than £400 million to £13.1 billion—£360 million more than the inflation-only increases since 2016-17. By the end of the current Holyrood term, we will have increased the health resource budget by £2 billion.

[Ronnie Cowan]

I have grave concern with regard to the people providing these services. Although we all seek to improve care across our communities, Brexit and the UK Government's hesitation in guaranteeing EU national rights for those in the UK means that we face a massive threat to the NHS workforce. As a result, we face losing valued and respected workers in the care sector and beyond. The free movement of people and the mutual recognition of qualifications allow skilled and experienced health professionals from the EU and the European economic area to work in our NHS. Without that, our ability to continue to provide high-quality health and social care services for the people of Scotland will suffer, particularly for the people in Scotland's remote and rural communities, and that will be echoed throughout the United Kingdom.

I always take great pleasure in engaging in the local carers' week in my community. It has happened in the past three years that I have been an MP. It is a learning process. Attending such events means that we can meet some of the best people in our communities. I learn from them on an ongoing basis, and I look forward to doing so. I ask this Government to take a serious long-term look at how to fund the service, where to get the people from and how to roll out the correct and appropriate training to help some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

3.21 pm

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Let me start by congratulating and thanking the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) for securing this debate and the Backbench Business Committee for granting the time on this very important issue. As the motion today notes, the transforming care programme was created with the stated intention of improving quality of care and quality of life for children and adults with a learning disability or autism who display challenging behaviours.

As we have heard from Members today, people with learning disabilities too often suffer from neglect, abuse, poor care and even premature death. Unfortunately, as the right hon. Gentleman set out, the transforming care programme simply is not delivering the promised improvements in their lives. Instead, too many are wrongly admitted to assessment and treatment units, in which they remain trapped, rather than living independently where they can be with their families and friends and, of course, the support network that comes with them. The community services that should be part of that support network are themselves underfunded and simply do not have the capacity that is needed. As it stands, the transforming care programme is unlikely even to come close to the ambitions rightly set out in the "Building the Right Support" strategy by March 2019, when it is due to conclude. Let us take, for example, the target to decommission 900 learning disability beds in conventional hospitals. The Minister admitted just this week, in an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), that the Government have not even come close to meeting the halfway point to that target.

Seven years after Winterbourne View and more than two years on from the start of "Building the Right Support" strategy, there has been a startling lack of

progress in key areas. There has been little reduction in the number of people in in-patient units and in the number of admissions. Indeed, the most recent data, from May 2018, shows that there are 2,400 people with a learning disability and/or autism in in-patient units, which is an increase since the last monthly data was released. It should be of great concern that the number of children in in-patient units has also increased. The latest NHS Digital data shows there are 250 children in these units, more than double the number of children—110—who were reported as being in in-patient units in March 2015. There are 465 young people aged between 18 and 24 in in-patient units, and this age group makes up a significant proportion of the whole transforming care in-patient cohort. This data suggests that the transition from child to adult services is the point at which people with learning disabilities are particularly at risk of admission, as Dame Christine Lenehan pointed out in her review last year.

As we have already heard this afternoon, the average length of stay in in-patient units has stayed largely the same, at approximately 5.4 years. Similarly, in answers to my hon. Friends Ministers have admitted that discharges into the community actually went down in the last year, and quite significantly so for those with learning disabilities. It is clear that transforming care is not delivering the promised outcomes at this time. Unfortunately, this failure fits the wider picture of neglect for people with learning disabilities and the services on which they rely.

The recent learning disabilities mortality review came seven years after Winterbourne View and nearly three years since the death of Connor Sparrowhawk, which in part prompted it. Its findings show the scant regard with which people with learning disabilities are treated.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): The fact that the risk of people with learning disabilities dying before the age of 50 is 58 times higher than the rest of the population is scandalous in itself.

Paula Sherriff: My hon. Friend makes a very valid point. Everybody here this afternoon could not fail to be shocked and horrified by the case outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) regarding her young constituent, Matthew, and the quality of care that he received on an in-patient unit.

Some 1,311 cases were passed for review between July 2016 and November 2017, but only 103—that is 8%—have finished so far. The report cited a lack of local capacity to review cases, inadequate training for people completing mortality reviews and insufficient staff capacity to complete a mortality review. Will the Minister update the House on when the remaining cases will be finalised and what the Department is doing to ensure that these barriers are tackled? In 13% of cases reviewed, the person's health had been adversely affected by delays in care or treatment, gaps in service provision, organisational dysfunction, neglect or abuse.

Just how many more deaths must occur before the Government tackle the unjust treatment of people with learning disabilities? Dr Ryan, Connor Sparrowhawk's mother, was also damning in her assessment. She said that too many agencies had shown "systematic disregard" for some people with learning disabilities and she felt that certain people "simply don't count" in the eyes of

the authorities. We must do better, and we must show that every single life matters. But our fear is that, without some fundamental changes in the Government's approach, the problem is set to get worse, not better.

Take the NHS workforce, for example. The latest figures from Health Education England show that the number of learning disability nurses working in the NHS has gone down by a third over five years. HEE data from March 2017 shows that learning disability nursing had the highest proportion of vacancies, at 16.3%, compared with all other fields of nursing. Will the Minister tell us how the Government plan to tackle this?

It is bad enough that the failures of transforming care have left too many people inappropriately in hospital settings, but the lack of trained staff when they are there makes that failure all the more stark.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I am with the hon. Lady in her criticisms, and in wanting some constructive developments and improvements, but I would not want her to stay at the Dispatch Box and paint a picture that is completely negative. There are some inspirational stories about people coming out of these settings and institutions after being dealt with by a caring team, who have put a particular emphasis on communications and turned lives around. Some of the case studies published by Dimensions show that that really is one of the ways forward, and that is what we should seek. It is possible to take an aggressive individual out of an in-patient setting and give them the quality of life and meaning to life that we would all want and expect.

Paula Sherriff: I thank the right hon. Lady for her intervention. I absolutely agree. There are some incredible examples around the country of excellent work that is being done, but that makes it all the more important that we share that good practice so that it is disseminated more widely. Particularly on this very special day of the NHS's 70th anniversary, I pay tribute to all those people who are involved in being innovative, and not just doing exactly what they have to and no more.

It is bad enough that the failure of transforming care has left too many people inappropriately in hospital settings, but the lack of trained staff when they are there makes that failure all the more stark. It is also a matter of great concern that the Government are not including people with learning disabilities, or working-age people with disabilities, in the social care Green Paper, but are instead having a "parallel workstream". Once again, the care needs of people with learning disabilities seem to have been put in second place.

If this catalogue of failure were not enough, the issue around sleep-ins threatens to make it even worse. It has been woefully mishandled thus far. Having admitted that earlier guidance on pay was misleading both for providers and commissioners, Ministers are now playing for time rather than finding a solution, ignoring warnings from care providers, charities, and the Local Government Association. The consequences for people with learning disabilities and autism could be disastrous. Some 70% of learning disability providers have warned that they will no longer be viable. It could drastically reduce the number of providers available to provide community services. For people with learning disabilities, autism or challenging behaviour who are personal budget-holders in receipt of funding from local authorities to pay care

staff themselves, this crisis could lead to difficulty in paying their personal back-pay bill and, in turn, having to reduce their level of support to cover costs.

Let me be clear, as a former healthcare worker and trade unionist, that the care workers affected should receive historic back pay for national minimum wage sleep-in shifts rather than paying the price for underfunding of social care. Given the state of the sector, without imminent investment we run the risk of a systemic failure that could leave thousands of people without the care that they desperately need. That is why we continue to call for the Government to reveal the full scale of financial liability and to increase funding for social care so that care providers can continue to deliver services to vulnerable people in need of care and workers can receive the pay to which they are entitled.

A Labour Government would provide care workers with paid travel time, access to training, and an option to choose regular hours. That, of course, comes in the context of proper investment, increasing social care budgets by £8 billion over the next Parliament, including an additional £1 billion for the first year to ease the Tory social care crisis. We have made our alternative crystal clear. Our policy will include all people with care needs, with the aim of ensuring that they can live independently and, most crucially, with dignity.

The question that the Minister must now answer is whether and how this Government can work towards that goal. Will there be a successor programme to transforming care? How will the shift to early intervention, prevention and community care be prioritised and properly resourced, given that what we have now is clearly not sufficient? In the end, this is a question of how we value human lives.

3.32 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I congratulate the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing this really important debate. I thank him for his continuing hard work and commitment, both within this place and outside, in championing the interests of people with a learning disability. As a Minister in the coalition, he was a driving force on this issue, particularly following the Winterbourne View scandal.

On a personal note, I also thank the right hon. Gentleman for the work that he did in commissioning an investigation into the tragedies at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. As a Health Minister, I have had to recuse myself from speaking about that because I am also the local Member of Parliament, but I want to put on record my gratitude to him for the work that he did. In many ways, there are parallels with what we are talking about today: families whose voices have not been heard; families who do not necessarily feel that they have been listened to. We all have to look at how we can learn the lessons from cases like Winterbourne View and how we stop other families suffering in the same way.

I thank other Members from across the House for participating in the debate. I am so sorry that there are not more of them, because this is a really important issue. I have met many of the Members here today to discuss their concerns. I will always be available to do that at another point if they would wish me to do so. They have asked me lots of questions. I will do my best to answer as many of them as I can in the time that you have permitted me, Madam Deputy Speaker. If I fail to do that, I will write to the Members concerned.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): For the sake of clarity, I should say to the Minister that I cannot limit her time, nor would I try to. In the current circumstances, she actually has an enormous amount of time, but I know that she will not try the patience of the House. I agree with her that a great many important questions have been raised, and I am sure she will wish, assiduously as ever, to answer them all. I will not interfere with the time that it takes her to do so.

Caroline Dinenge: That truly is good news, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will try not to go on, as my husband tells me I have a propensity to do. I will answer as many questions as I can. I may have misinterpreted some of them, and I may not be able to read the copious notes I have written, but I will write to Members if I do not get to their points.

We can all agree that people with a learning disability and/or autism have the right to the same opportunities as everyone else to live satisfying and valued lives and to be treated with dignity and respect; that goes for their families, too. As good and as necessary as in-patient care can be—we have heard examples of how it has changed people's lives—we know that people with a learning disability should have the opportunity to live at home, to develop and maintain relationships and to get the support they need to live healthy, safe and rewarding lives in their own local communities.

The mandate to NHS England—the list of “must dos” for the NHS—set by the Government every year includes the following clear objective:

“We expect NHS England to strive to reduce the health gap between people with mental health problems, learning disabilities and autism and the population as a whole, and support them to live full, healthy and independent lives.”

The transforming care programme is at the heart of that commitment. It is a partnership across local government and the NHS to transform the care, support and treatment available to enable people with a learning disability, autism or both to lead the lives of their choosing with and in their local community.

Through the national transformation plan, “Building the Right Support”, we have an ambitious and comprehensive plan to bring councils and clinical commissioning groups together in transforming care partnerships to plan and provide services across their areas; to use funding in new ways, including through pooling budgets, which I will talk about in a moment; and to ensure that people and their families have a clear idea of what they should expect from those agencies through the national service model. Key to all that has been building the right support in the community so that people do not need to go to hospital in the first place and those who are already there can move out.

Members have raised concerns today about the progress made under the transforming care programme. I can reassure them that progress continues to be made, but I will commit to take forward most seriously all the concerns raised today. The number of in-patients continues to decrease, and it is down to 2,400. NHS England has been clear that it is fully committed to meeting the ambition to reduce the number of in-patients by at least 35% by next March. It has talked about the intention to close around 900 learning disability beds. I entirely take the point made by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) that focusing on the

number of beds misses the point, and that it must be about ensuring that community provision and support are available to enable people to make that move, rather than the fact that beds are closing.

Norman Lamb: I appreciate the Minister being willing to write to us after the debate with anything she is not able to cover. Does she understand the concern that a headlong rush to meet the target because we are getting close to the deadline without proper arrangements in place could be disastrous for individuals? If the target is not achieved, that is better than a complete failure, with readmissions after failed discharges. The focus on detail in every case is critical.

Caroline Dinenge: I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. I do not want to have concerns about safe discharge, and that is why we look at that in care and treatment reviews. More than 7,000 of those reviews have been carried out, to reduce the time that people stay in hospital and improve the quality of care they receive while in hospital. Essentially, they are a step towards ensuring that community provision is available before people are allowed to leave hospital. The latest data show that the proportion of in-patients reported as never having had a care and treatment review was 8%, down from 47% in January 2016.

Norman Lamb: It should be 0%.

Caroline Dinenge: Absolutely, it should be 0%. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, that is what we are working towards.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I appreciate that this is quite a complex area, but I have looked at some of the transition times. Dimensions—I mentioned it earlier—has estimated that its average transition time per patient is 12.5 months, which I believe is below the usual transition time. Does the Minister feel that this length of time will inhibit her from reaching her targets in 2019? Is there anything we can do to reduce the time, or does that length of time need to be taken?

Caroline Dinenge: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. NHS England says it is confident of hitting these targets and it will be doing all it can to ensure that that happens, but that must not be at the cost of treating people with the right levels of care or of having the right provision in place. This is also about keeping people out of the hospital setting in the first place.

The number of people receiving community or pre-admission care, education and treatment reviews also continues to improve, with 42% more undertaken in 2017-18 than in the previous year, of which 79% led to a decision not to admit somebody to in-patient care.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I do not know whether the Minister will accept this, but I would have thought that everybody involved in this debate actually preferred us not to aim for a target that might not be reachable, because it is the quality of the outcomes and successful transitions that we are looking for. Will she be flexible enough to say, on looking at this again, that if we cannot achieve the targets by 2019, she will allow the timeframe to drop out of the picture? It is more important to have a successful transition, with the right length of time for somebody to transition, than to hit what might be an unattainable target.

Caroline Dinenge: I agree with my right hon. Friend that there is absolutely no point in having arbitrary targets that do not actually deliver the quality we are aiming for. As we all know from political history, targets for the sake of it have not always necessarily worked out in the way intended.

It is worth emphasising that this is a really special programme for people with very complex needs who require a very particular type of support. They also need to have their care reviewed and to have a bespoke package put in place, tailored to their needs, to allow them to live in the community. There is no one single intervention and no template for what care is needed because every person is different.

Norman Lamb: Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Dinenge: If I may make a little progress, I will definitely answer the right hon. Gentleman's questions a bit later.

Care must be personalised, and it must be enduring. This can never be a case of rolling out a particular model of care across the country or seen as kicking off some kind of universal service.

To further accelerate discharge and the community service necessary to provide it, NHS England has transferred £50 million to clinical commissioning groups that are closing hospital beds so that they can invest in community alternatives. In addition, between 2015 and the end of the programme, NHS England will have invested over £50 million in transformation funding to support transforming care partnerships in putting in place the critical components of community support. This support includes community forensic teams, crisis prevention teams and teams focused on supporting children in the community.

Additionally, the Department of Health and Social Care has provided capital grants of over £23 million, which has been spent on housing to support people to return to live in the community or to prevent an admission to hospital. NHS England has a pipeline of further investments that it plans to deliver over the next year to support housing projects, to accelerate bed decommissioning and discharges and, most specifically and importantly, to develop community teams.

Members have expressed concern that once the transforming care programme ends in March 2019, action to support those with a learning disability and the most complex needs will also end, but I stress emphatically that that is not the case. NHS organisations and local authorities have come together to build on existing practice, and they have engaged with families and organisations to develop innovative plans to suit their areas. That must not stop. We are closing those beds permanently, and ensuring good-quality community provision is more important than ever. We should be crystal clear that the principles of building the right support will endure beyond March 2019. The philosophy is to change the way that we support people with learning disabilities for good.

Norman Lamb *rose*—

Caroline Dinenge: Perhaps I can make a bit of progress and then I will come back to the right hon. Gentleman. We are not moving people from a hospital, where their outcomes are poor, into the community,

just for them to be replaced in hospital by others. The transformation must be permanent, and we must consider what central support local areas need to ensure that that happens.

Hon. Members have been tempting me to talk about what will happen beyond March 2019, and to give a commitment on how the future of transforming care will look beyond that point. All delivery partners share a commitment to support the progress made by local partnerships to transform the choices available for local people, and to ensure that they are supported to lead fuller and more independent lives in their local communities. Plans are currently under way, and we will provide hon. Members with further updates once they have been finalised.

Transforming care is not the only area in which we seek to support those with a learning disability, and we are driving work to improve health and care outcomes across the board. It is an uncomfortable truth that mortality rates for people with a learning disability can be a measure of how well their care needs are being met. Following the publication of the report "Confidential Inquiry into premature deaths of people with learning disabilities" in 2013, we know that those with a learning disability die much earlier than those without, and too often for completely avoidable reasons. That is unforgivable.

In order to tackle that issue, in 2015 we established the learning disabilities mortality review programme, which requires consistent, local scrutiny across England into the deaths of anyone with a learning disability, so that action can be taken based on those findings. Like me, hon. Members will have been deeply concerned by the recent report from the University of Bristol, which leads that programme. The report highlights the persistence of inequalities faced by people with learning disabilities in their health and care. People with learning disabilities are still dying prematurely, and I was particularly alarmed and distressed to note that neglect, abuse, delays in treatment, and gaps in service provision played a part in one in eight of the deaths reviewed, which is unacceptable. The situation described in the report must change, and the Government will soon respond to its national recommendations in full. I am pleased, however, that we are not waiting for that publication to ensure that action is taken, and significant remedial actions are already under way.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that as well as implementation we must embed change and ensure that we never revert back—that is key and something I am determined to focus on. We need a relentless focus on improvement, and I am convinced that training is a key part of that. Local commissioners must use that learning and take appropriate remedial action in their own areas.

The NHS improvement learning disability standards published in June specify that an NHS trust should measure the service it provides against clearly defined standards, so as to identify improvements. We will collect information on every trust centrally, to monitor how well the needs of people with learning disabilities are being met.

Hon. Members mentioned workforce and training, and on 9 May we announced a £10 million fund for incentives for postgraduate students to go on to work in the fields of mental health and learning disabilities, as well as for those who go on to work in community nursing roles. We are considering the most effective way

[Caroline Dinenage]

to implement an incentive scheme. Our response to the LeDeR report will address its clear recommendations on workforce training.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about how we improve data. Clearly, with monthly data published on progress we are aiming for transparency. NHS Digital is working with the transforming care partnerships to make sure that we have high-quality data. The aim is for the mental health services dataset to be the main dataset in the future.

I was pleased that Members spoke with positivity about some of the outcomes for their constituents, albeit in some cases way too late. I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) for talking about some of the transformational results of the work so far. We clearly need to see more of it. The right hon. Member for North Norfolk talked about what an incredible difference the Shared Lives scheme can make. My self-appointed best friend, an adult from my constituency with learning disabilities who sadly passed away last year, lived in a Shared Lives home. I saw what an incredible relationship she had with the family she lived with.

Norman Lamb: I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way. On that specific point, she will probably be aware that the development of Shared Lives is quite variable around the country. There are some regions where it has developed quite well and other regions where there is virtually nothing. The Government could give more resource to expand the programme, because that is the way that we really change lives, getting people out of institutions and giving them a fulfilling life.

Caroline Dinenage: I am very glad the right hon. Gentleman said that because as part of the Department of Health and Social Care legacy scheme we are providing £70,000 in this year for that sort of intermediate and reablement provision which Share Lives would come under. We should definitely be investing more in that.

I take very seriously the right hon. Gentleman's point on conflicts of interest. We have to look at that very carefully, because it might imply that any clinician would be conflicted in making a clinical decision because they are employed by a trust. Providers are monitored by the CQC and doctors are of course subject to extremely rigorous professional registration, but I take what he says very seriously and I will look more closely at his concerns. I am very happy to meet him to discuss this issue further if he would like me to do so.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about pooling resources. There are now formal mechanisms for that to take place, such as section 75 and the ways in which CCGs and local authorities can work together. That is the point of having transforming care partnerships' commissioners working together.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the exclusion of families from decisions. That really upsets me and it really should not happen. There are legal duties, under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the Mental Health Act 2007, to have independent mental health advocates. I would be very keen to speak to him further about what more we can do to make sure that the legislation is having the desired effect.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham knows I am a massive fan of hers. She has probably done more to further the cause of individuals with autism and their families than anybody else in the history of this building. She spoke with great knowledge about autism and was absolutely right to point out that transforming care is not only about learning disabilities but people with autism. In Think Autism, the adult autism strategy, we set a programme of action across Government to support autistic people to lead fulfilling and independent lives where possible. We have recently refreshed the governance arrangements that will achieve greater traction and delivery of the required outcomes, better supporting autistic people to live healthy independent lives and participate in their local communities.

My right hon. Friend spoke about autism care pathways. NHS England is developing a framework of adult community mental health services which will include care for adults with comorbid neurodevelopmental disorders and/or learning disabilities, rather than the pathways planned and set out in the "Five Year Forward View" implementation plan. NHS England's care pathway programme has evolved to take account of the current operational context and expert service user advice. The pathway is linear about discrete episodes of care, so is more appropriate for specific interventions undertaken by specialist teams.

My right hon. Friend spoke about the barriers that autistic people face in accessing mental health services. Trusts should already be ensuring that services are accessible to people with autism and that they have made reasonable adjustments to care pathways to ensure that people with learning disabilities and autism can access the highly personalised care and achieve the equality of outcome that we all want.

The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood spoke about her constituent, Matthew Garnett. It was a great pleasure to meet the hon. Lady and Matthew's mum, Isabelle, recently. I was very shocked to hear of Matthew's experience and deeply upset to see the pictures of him at his lowest ebb, when he was suffering from the neglect that she spoke of. It was very distressing. I am pleased that the NHS is learning from this. The Marsh review into Matthew's care has helped to shape a much more focused approach to the needs of children and young people who are at risk of slipping into the sort of crisis that she mentioned. The operational delivery group allows stakeholders, including young people, to shape policy.

Helen Hayes: The right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) raised the issue of St Andrew's in Northampton having been able to expand so significantly with the benefit of NHS funding—I cannot remember the exact percentage, but the percentage of funding that comes from the NHS for St Andrew's is up in the eighties and nineties. Does she agree that this is not the right model and will she commit to looking at limiting the further expansion of private in-patient beds, when they are not what is needed for treating young people with autism and learning disability?

Caroline Dinenage: We can certainly look at what the hon. Lady suggests. I am pleased that the operational delivery group, which I just mentioned, allows stakeholders to shape policy and it is really good news that Isabelle Garnett, Matthew's mum, is a major contributor to this

and liaises with NHS England directly on its programme around children either in hospital or at risk of being admitted.

The right hon. Member for North Norfolk asked why the evaluation was cancelled. As he knows, an evaluation sponsored by NHS England is already under way, and the Department, having invited bids for its evaluation, was not satisfied that the proposals received were what was needed. That does not mean that we are not absolutely determined to critically review progress, particularly working with stakeholders and users.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the “No voice unheard, no right ignored” Green Paper. Although I am always ready to bow to his incredible knowledge in this field, it is not entirely true to say that the Green Paper went unheeded. Some of the recommendations were overtaken by changes in Government policy, and indeed, in Governments, but we have taken forward work such as the named social worker pilot and a review of the Mental Health Act. We have asked Professor Sir Simon Wessely, the chair of the independent review, to listen to people with direct experience of the Mental Health Act and this, of course, includes autistic people and their carers. He published his interim report to update the Government on his progress, which sets out specific issues that we must explore to look at how we can improve the scope of the Act.

The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood also spoke about training for teachers in autism. The Department for Education has funded training and support for teachers through the Autism Education Trust. That is in early years, schools and further education, and so far, 175,000 staff have been trained.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Does my hon. Friend also welcome the fact that from September this year in initial teacher training, the possibility of having a module on autism will now be included? It is something that we worked very hard for and the Department for Education responded. This is about not just the historical training, which is so important, but the future training that is coming on-stream from September this year.

Caroline Dinéage: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that, and I am sure that its introduction is in no small part down to her incredible work.

Society has failed people with learning disabilities for too many years. Our aim is to put things right. People are at the heart of the transforming care delivery programme. The priority is to provide safe, high-quality care that is appropriate for everyone. We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that people with learning disabilities have the opportunity to live as full and independent lives as possible.

3.59 pm

Norman Lamb: I think I can safely say that the debate this afternoon has reflected quality rather than quantity. I am not referring to my own contribution, of course. We have focused on an important issue, and I am grateful that the Minister has treated it with the seriousness it deserves. I want quickly to highlight the key things that I think she needs to focus on, and I would be delighted to meet her to discuss them, perhaps together with the key organisations that I referred to at the start.

The Minister did not particularly focus on children in her response. If we are to have a system that works in a sustainable way in the long term, keeping children out of institutions will be key to solving the problem, particularly given that the numbers have doubled in the past few years and that we are going in the wrong direction. I particularly commend to her the brilliantly led Starfish programme in Norfolk as an exemplar of what can be done to keep people out of institutions.

On workforce training, I was pleased to hear about the money—£10 million, I think—for postgrads, but we also need training for the frontline staff in community settings who make the return to the community possible. A really important point was made about Alderwood and the experience of the constituents of the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). I also talked about Fauzia in this context. Training is needed in how autism affects individuals. It is not just about training in autism generally. Understanding the impact on an individual is what is so important, as is wider community training.

The Minister said that mechanisms were now in place to shift money across. What I do not understand is why that does not appear to be working effectively enough. If it is there, why is it not happening routinely? Why cannot the money just shift to a local authority to facilitate a much-needed community place? I am reassured that the work will continue after March next year, but it needs a national programme. I am afraid that it cannot just be left to localities. We know that there are some great places around the country doing amazing work, but others are falling well behind. There needs to be an inspiring national drive and the sense of an imperative that things have to change, wherever people live.

On the cross-departmental work and the taskforce to which the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) referred, we must recognise the importance of employment opportunities. So many people can work and can be paid in work, and that of course relieves the burden on the statutory services. Understanding that, and recognising that housing plays a vital part in this—

Caroline Dinéage: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Norman Lamb: Am I allowed to give way, Madam Deputy Speaker? I am coming to the end of my response very soon—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Technically, no. The right hon. Gentleman has a strict two minutes to sum up at the end. However, I recognise that really important issues are being discussed here, and the Minister clearly has something to add. I am not creating a precedent here, but I am, unusually, allowing her to intervene.

Caroline Dinéage: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. My lack of understanding of the rules is clearly shining through quite beautifully here. I completely forgot to say earlier that we have an inter-ministerial group on disability in society which met for the first time yesterday, and I hope that it will go some way towards achieving some of the improvements that the right hon. Gentleman wants to see.

Norman Lamb: I am very glad to hear that. I was unaware that I had only two minutes, so I am really sorry, but I am pleased that you are so chilled out this afternoon, Madam Deputy Speaker. I applaud you for that.

I am pleased that the Minister has said that we must learn the lessons from the mortality review. Also, we must recognise the critical importance of involving the individual and the family in the decision making and in shaping the programme, in every case. This is about human rights, and human rights are routinely being abused and ignored. That must end. I am grateful to everyone who has spoken in the debate to highlight the critical issues involved in giving people the chance of a good life.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House is concerned at the slow progress made under the Transforming Care programme, which was set up to improve the care and quality of life of children and adults with a learning disability and/or autism who display behaviour that challenges; recognises that a substantial number of people with learning disabilities remain trapped in, and continue to be inappropriately admitted to, Assessment and Treatment Units rather than living with support in the community; is further concerned at the lack of capacity within community services; notes evidence of the neglect, abuse, poor care, and premature deaths of people with learning disabilities; believes that the Transforming Care programme is unlikely to realise the ambitions set out in the Building the Right Support strategy before it ends in March 2019; calls on the Government to establish, prioritise, and adequately resource a successor programme that delivers a shift away from institutional care by investing in community services across education, health and social care; and further calls on the Government to ensure that such a programme is based on lifelong support that protects people's human rights and promotes their independence and wellbeing.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is there a means of putting it on record that the House's business has finished just after 4 o'clock, collapsing an hour early, even though our important debate on baby leave in the House got pulled because of insufficient time? I understand that both this afternoon's Westminster Hall debates also finished early. Do you agree that there ought to be a better way of organising business in the House so that important issues that need to be discussed have the time they need for discussion when other business falls short?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I understand the hon. Lady's point and her frustration that the debate on proxy voting, which we were all looking forward to, has not taken place, but she will understand that time had to be given in today's proceedings for the Home Secretary to come to the House and address an urgent and important matter that arose only yesterday and which no one could have predicted. I am also aware that the timetabling of today's business was

so arranged, with a 2.30 pm cut-off for the first debate, because the Government were anxious to protect the time for the important matter we have just discussed in Back-Bench time. In saying that, I hope that those observing our proceedings will appreciate that the lack of Members in the Chamber did not reflect the importance the House attaches to this matter. It is extremely important; some of us have been debating these matters here for decades and are finally beginning to make progress. So while I take her point—it is well made—the fact is that sometimes the House has to adjust to events in the world outside, and that was why the Home Secretary needed time this afternoon.

PETITION

Planning Application: Chelveston-cum-Caldecott

4.7 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove) is in the Chamber because this petition affects his constituency as much as mine. I have presented many petitions in this House, but this is probably the one I am most concerned about. It refers to a planning application in my constituency for what is called a recycling plant, but is something that will create dioxins and other dangerous chemicals. There is no similar plant in this country. I do not want, in a few years, to find out that babies born in my constituency are deformed. The lead petitioners are Kaye Pentland, Tony Dawson and Martin Izzard, who are all members of RAID—Residents Against Inappropriate Development—which is the community group opposing the planning application. The petition has been signed by several hundred of my constituents.

The petition states:

The Humble Petition of Chelveston-cum-Caldecott and the surrounding areas,

Sheweth,

That the Petitioners believe that the proposed development by Energy Roots Ltd planning application No. 18/00006/WASFUL for a Construction of a Plastic Recycling and Recovery Facility, should be refused on the grounds of the great cost to the environment, agricultural land, and residents with harmful emissions from the plant. Hazardous emissions will include Nitrogen Dioxide, Sulphur Dioxide, Nitric Acid, Hydrogen Chloride, Ammonia, Particulate matter, Dioxins and Furans.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urges the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Communities and Local Government, Northamptonshire County Council and East Northamptonshire Council to take in account the concerns of petitioners and refuse to grant the planning application for a Plastic Recycling and Recovery Facility to Energy Roots Ltd.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

[P002173]

Paupers' Funerals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Mims Davies.*)

4.9 pm

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Losing a loved one is heartbreaking. Almost everyone in this House will have suffered the loss of a loved one: a parent, a grandparent, a friend, or even—the worst nightmare of all—a child. Funerals provide the chance of a final goodbye. They allow us to grieve, as a family or as friends, sharing the loss of someone close. The ability to say goodbye at a funeral is a necessary part of the grieving process, a staging post in loss. Funerals can change moods. They can lift hearts. Sharing stories and reflecting on memories keep the spirit of the one we have lost alive in our hearts, minds and memories. It is because of the importance of the shared experience of grief that the character of the last parting matters so very much.

Public health funerals, or national assistance funerals as they are called in Scotland, occur when a family cannot, or in a minority of cases refuses to, pay the cost of the funeral of a departed relative or other loved one. As we would and should expect in a civilised and compassionate country, the state, in the form of local councils, steps in to cover the cost of a basic funeral. However, recent press and media coverage has revealed the shocking reality of public health funerals, which are sometimes callous, careless or even cruel. Dubbed “paupers’ funerals”, they can be occasions on which, as an official from Bracknell Forest Council has put it:

“There’s no attendees, no keeping of the ashes. Nobody’s invited; you don’t have any say over the funeral at all...It’s literally as basic as basic can get”.

That is what modern paupers’ funerals are: the reduction of a human life to something that is

“as basic as basic can get”.

As a Christian country, we surely believe that every life has intrinsic value. I follow, or at least try to follow, the commandment to treat others as I would wish to be treated. There can be no pretence that these public health funerals fulfil our Christian duty. They are the very antithesis of what Christ taught us.

In the 1860s, Charles Dickens wrote of that ultimate manifestation of the cruel neglect at the rotten core of liberal utilitarianism, the Poor Law—which included the original scourge of paupers’ funerals—that it was

“to degrade a Christian’s duty into a charlatan’s trick”.

To the shame of our age, Dickens’s words remain an apt description of modern public health funerals.

The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) moved us all when she recounted the heartbreaking story of losing her son. She has already succeeded in changing Government policy on children’s funerals, and now I hope that I can play a part in changing it on public health funerals. There are two things that the Government can do to bring about change and to relieve the pressure of funeral poverty. First, they can carry out an urgent review of the 15-year-old cap on funeral expenses payments. In April 2003, a £700 cap was imposed, and it has since remained in place. The payment is combined with help that is intended to cover some of the cost of a burial plot, cremation fees, travel,

the moving of a body and death certificates. However, a maximum of £700 is hardly sufficient, even with those supplements.

The policy is simply no longer fit for purpose. When the cap was introduced in 2003, the average cost of a funeral was £1,920. Since then, the price of funerals has increased by 112%. That means that the £700 of assistance offered would, on average, cover about 17% of the cost of a funeral, compared with 36% in 2003. Given that, it is hardly surprising that the number of public health funerals has increased by more than 200% since 1997. The Government should examine whether more can be done to alleviate the financial burden of funerals. The Minister will know that the Department for Work and Pensions began to help last year by allowing recipients of funeral payments to receive additional contributions without deductions, by extending the application period for a claim from three to six months, by clarifying that the funeral payments will cover the cost of a burial with or without exclusive rights of burial, and with the ability to submit evidence electronically. Nevertheless, it is time to do more.

The heart of reform must be an urgent examination of the appalling way in which some public health funerals are routinely conducted. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) was surely right to say that

“the idea that because you are poor you should have no tangible means through which to remember and pay your respects for a loved one is appalling.”

The Government should issue statutory guidance to every relevant local authority describing in detail best practice in the conduct of public health funerals.

In the absence of such guidance, bad practice has persisted. According to *The Sunday Times*, a number of councils, including Glasgow and Bracknell Forest, imposed bans on family and friends attending these funerals and denied the bereaved the remains of their deceased loved ones. Who could possibly believe that grieving families should be forbidden from saying a last goodbye to those lost to the grave? I am pleased to say that my own council, South Holland, always ensures that family members can attend and are made aware of the date of the funeral, with the proper dignity and respect that such an occasion deserves. Furthermore, authorities must without any quibbling make the ashes of the deceased available to loved ones. A Glasgow City Council official was recorded telling a reporter:

“It’s us having to pay for it, so, as I say, she will not get his ashes back.”

That is appalling. Local authorities should have a duty to surrender the remains to the family; the ashes, just like the memories, belong to those who loved the departed. I understand that in some local authorities, such as mine, it is less expensive to bury someone than to cremate them. The problem seems to be centred on those places where cremation is the cheapest option.

Finally, it is the comforting delusion of those who regard the past with disdain—perhaps from misplaced guilt, or because they know little or nothing of it—that our age is at the apex of accomplishment. The more thoughtful here know that many things were once better. For now, in our time, paupers’ funerals ban children from mothers’ gravesides. Now, in our kingdom, some public officials refuse to inform children of their father’s cremation. Now, in this age, parents who have loved and

[Mr John Hayes]

lost cannot keep their child's ashes to scatter or retain. This outrage must end, and the Government must make it happen.

4.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): It is a pleasure to be responding to my first debate at the Dispatch Box with you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in the Chair, who were presiding when I made my maiden speech, and to be responding to my right hon. Friend, and indeed my friend, the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes).

My right hon. Friend spoke with his famed eloquence and passion, but also with typical compassion, on a hugely important issue about which, in our compassionate and decent society, we should all care. As he said, a funeral plays a huge part in helping all of us, at one of the most difficult points in our lives, come to terms with loss and grief. This issue was also more broadly raised in a debate in Westminster Hall last October by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh).

Public health funerals are likely to become necessary when either, sadly, a deceased person dies alone with no family or friends to organise a funeral or because the bereaved family does not, or is for various reasons unable to, make funeral arrangements. In either situation, the relevant local authority has a statutory duty under section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 to make arrangements for the disposal of the body. To respond to my right hon. Friend's points, it is important to highlight that the 1984 Act contains no statutory requirement for the local authority to make any arrangements beyond that, nor is it prescriptive of how they deliver on their obligation nor does it contain provision for regulations for statutory guidance or instruction on how they must do so. However, I hear my right hon. Friend's point, and I have asked my Department to clarify and confirm that my understanding of that position is correct.

In a humane and civilised society, it is reasonable, and indeed proper, to expect that the deceased person and, where they can be involved, their bereaved family are treated with the dignity and compassion they deserve. I am sure that that is what happens in many local authority areas. For example, I have recently heard of a council where officials routinely attend public health funerals themselves—I believe that this is the case in the City of Westminster, among many others—to ensure that the deceased person is not alone in that final act.

However, the Government and I, like my right hon. Friend, are deeply concerned at the alleged practices of some local authorities, such as refusing to tell bereaved families where and when the funeral is taking place or refusing to return their loved one's remains following cremation. Media reports—my right hon. Friend alluded to the report in *The Sunday Times* in May—suggest that that may be an attempt to deter future reliance on the local authority's obligation to step in if other arrangements cannot be made. We all appreciate that local authorities should be mindful of public money, providing a decent funeral but ensuring that care is taken with that public money, but the key thing is that word “decent”. I am deeply concerned that, if true, the reports suggest completely unacceptable behaviour that would be putting bereaved

families through unnecessary additional stress and insensitive treatment at an already extremely difficult time in their lives and when they are, in many cases, already managing on a low income. This is about sensitivity, decency and doing the right thing, and that should permeate the approach. I urge all local authorities to reflect on those words.

The legislation and lack of centralised control and powers to mandate is a reflection of the fact that public health funerals are a cross-cutting issue, that local authorities are best placed to determine local priorities and that this matter has sat with local authorities for many decades. It is a pleasure to be here answering on the behalf of the Ministry of Justice today, but colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government all have a role to play. Historically, the Government have not centrally collated information on the number and cost of the public health funerals that councils manage annually. However, a series of freedom of information requests in recent years appear to show a consistent rise in both elements. The most recent of these requests, published by ITV News last month, was based on responses from 300 councils across the UK. It indicated that there has been a 70% increase in the number of public health funerals in the past three years, to around 15,000 last year, at a cost to local authorities of around £4 million in the last financial year.

As I have alluded to, local authorities are independent from central Government in providing their services and are responsible to their own electors and for managing their budgets in line with local priorities. That is how it should be and, as a former councillor, I recognise the importance of that local accountability and local decision making. However, that does not obviate the need for those local authorities to reflect on their obligations with the moneys they have given to them to ensure that this area is not neglected. It is absolutely right that local priorities should determine local spending, but I urge local authorities to reflect on my words about decency.

As my right hon. Friend alluded to, the Government have acted to address the financial pressures that death and bereavement can put on both families and local authorities. On 1 April, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced her intention to establish a children's funeral fund for England, which all Members would warmly welcome, with the intention that, at such an incredibly difficult and distressing time in their lives, bereaved parents will not have to worry about the essential costs of burying or cremating their child. As the House will know, arrangements for similar funding have already been put in place by the Welsh Assembly Government, and the Scottish Government have recently announced their intention to do the same.

This difficult but important issue has, of course, been championed by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). Although she is not in her place today, I take the opportunity to pay tribute to her for her work, for her tenacity and for her courage in doing so in the light of her own tragic experience. She is an hon. Lady of great decency, commitment and compassion. This House is the better for her presence, and her constituents are lucky to have her representing their interests.

The hon. Lady has continued in her work to support those for whom death and bereavement bring unmanageable financial pressure. On 8 June she co-ordinated and sent

a cross-party letter to the Prime Minister, supported by a significant number of hon. Members, calling for the establishment of minimum standards in the provision of public health funerals by local authorities. This action was prompted by concern about the media reports that gave rise to today's debate, and I understand my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is responding to that letter.

Public health funerals are not needed in the vast majority of deaths. I have mentioned the figure of 15,000 public health funerals a year, which represents around 3% of the total annual number of deaths in the UK. It is right that, where a family are in a position to take responsibility for the cost of funeral arrangements, they should do so. However, there are times when state support is appropriate and necessary, and we are committed to supporting vulnerable people going through bereavement who, depending on their situation, may need to draw on different elements of support.

That support, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings alluded to, includes the provision of funeral expenses payments to help people on qualifying benefits with the cost of arranging a funeral. Such payments make a significant contribution to the cost of a simple, respectful, decent funeral, covering the necessary costs of burial or cremation and in addition up to £700 for other funeral expenses.

Mr Hayes: I am sure the Minister is just about to announce it, and I do not want to steal his thunder because he is a fine new member of the Government, but I called for the cap to be lifted. He may want to make that announcement now and make a big impact, or he might want to reflect and write to me about it very soon.

Edward Argar: My right hon. Friend is typically beguiling in attempting to persuade me to announce changes to policy from the Dispatch Box. However, the funding offered from the funeral expenses payments

scheme and the social fund budgeting loan—he has referred to other measures taken by the Government, such as changing the rules so that additional contributions may be received without deductions being necessary from that fund—provides a level of support while, crucially, maintaining a fiscally viable fund.

I hear my right hon. Friend's comments about the 2003 cap on that second element, and I will ensure that the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse)—the Department for Work and Pensions administers the fund—is made aware of my right hon. Friend's comments and of the case he has made today. I sense my ministerial colleague may well be writing to him in response to that specific point.

In conclusion, I wish to thank my right hon. Friend for providing this hugely valuable opportunity to discuss, once again, such an important and sensitive issue. It is of course a truism that death touches us all. For many of us, the funeral arrangements are something that can be planned for and managed, but for some they are something for which the local authority and local government must take on responsibility, in a sense representing the local community. I believe that many councils do so honourably and carry out their duties with utmost respect for the dignity of the deceased person and their family. However, as I have said, it is of deep concern that some allegedly do not. I conclude by exhorting those few to show the compassion and sensitivity any of us would wish to be shown were we to find ourselves in those circumstances. I also reiterate the clear commitment of the Prime Minister, this Government and myself, as a Minister, to work with colleagues to ensure that the system of public health funerals continues to provide that decency and decent send-off we would all wish for.

Question put and agreed to.

4.31 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 5 July 2018

[STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Universal Health Coverage

1.30 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the role of universal health coverage in tackling preventable and treatable diseases.

I would first like to thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting this debate. I have been lobbied fairly heavily on the subject and a number of organisations asked me to approach the Committee and request a debate. I am pleased to see the Minister in his place. He and I have discussed the matter before. It is probably one of those issues that involves not only the Department of Health but perhaps the Department for International Development. He once told me that he took part in a debate that covered five different Departments—I suppose he is a man of many talents—so he will be able to answer wisely for the Departments covered in this debate. I thank hon. Members for coming along to Westminster Hall on such a warm day, and given the almost end-of-season approach we seem to have to matters now.

I wish to begin, as we approach the 70th anniversary of our NHS, by thanking all those who have made that institution all that it is. I have said that in other places, but I wanted to say it publicly now in Westminster Hall. Many political parties have had the opportunity to be part of the creation of our great NHS, and many of us have had the opportunity to be cared for by it, both surgically—in operations—and through the care that nurses provide in hospitals, which I personally have had on three occasions over the past year. I am thankful to every person involved in the NHS, from the porter to the paediatric consultant, from the occupational therapist to the oncologist, from the scrub nurse to the surgeon, from the auxiliary nurse to the audiology clinician, and all people in between. I thank them all very much for all that they do for us as patients, but also for us as a nation. I want to put that on the record.

I thank NHS staff for making the NHS work in situations that often seem unworkable, due to stress and pressure. As the Democratic Unionist party's spokesperson on health, I am frequently contacted by those who need more than the service has to offer. A great many times we focus on the problems of the NHS and where we are—that is the way life is—but we also need to reflect on how good it is and how much we owe it.

People often come to us with their problems; they do not necessarily come to us to tell us how good a job we are doing. Perhaps half a dozen people will call in a week to say what a good a job we are doing, but hundreds of others will come to us with their complaints. That is the nature of the job. It is not about complaining; it is part of the job. I believe that I must highlight where we are going wrong, or perhaps where we can do things better. We must see if we can do things along those lines.

Today it is my desire to thank all those who work in the NHS so tirelessly, who do not always get the recognition they deserve. The NHS is our nation's greatest asset. A Member said in the main Chamber today during business questions that the NHS was probably our nation's greatest accomplishment. I tend to agree, as I am sure would many others. The NHS embodies our British values of compassion and fairness. It represents our nation's strong sense of justice and the desire to help those in need. With its quality of care and pioneering scientific research, it is a world-leading institution.

Across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the NHS works in partnership with many universities and private companies on research and development for drugs that can help save lives. Queen's University Belfast is one of those universities, and I know that because it is one of the institutions that I would call in on. Indeed, just three months ago I visited its cancer research team to see the scientific work they are doing. They were over here this week, along with staff from breast cancer charities, in the Attlee suite in Portcullis House, and we had a chance to catch up. What they are doing to try to find cures for cancer at all levels is incredible. There is also the complexity of breast cancer treatment to consider, because many people have different variations, so the drugs they take must be just as varied.

The NHS is the type of British export that can help underpin the UK's global Britain vision, which I believe we lead the world on and which we can be the forerunners for. Health for all, which is the bedrock of this most beloved institution, is a principle that the UK originated in 1948, when it first embarked on the altruistic duty of creating a national health system to provide care to everyone, everywhere, without their having to experience financial hardship.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I agree with everything the hon. Gentleman has said so far about the NHS. I saw its merits at first hand when I had a baby two years ago. However, I wish to make a point about the current shortage in the NHS of the BCG vaccine, which is used to treat tuberculosis. My constituent, Hussein, is 11 months old. He was born in Lebanon but is a British citizen. His parents have told me that their GP said that Hussein cannot have the BCG vaccine on the NHS because he was born outside the UK. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although our NHS has a fantastic track record in tackling diseases and providing care, in order for it to have a successful future every British citizen must be entitled to the preventive medicines on offer?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I know that the Minister, like me, listened carefully to what she said. If there is clearly the anomaly that she outlines, the NHS should reply and make the vaccine available. I am quite incredulous that someone who is a citizen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland cannot have it. That is almost impossible to understand. I am sure that the hon. Lady will receive a response from the Minister in whatever time is left at the end of the debate.

The NHS is the purest and simplest definition of universal health coverage, and it is the world's oldest and most successful model. The World Health Organisation estimates that half the world's population lack access to

[Jim Shannon]

essential healthcare services and that 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty by healthcare expenses. We have problems as well. I get frustrated sometimes when constituents come to me. I am referring to Northern Ireland, where health is a devolved matter and therefore not the Minister's responsibility, but I believe that these cases illustrate some of the issues. A constituent told me this week that a consultant had said to them, "Well, you're going to have to wait maybe 53 weeks for an operation." If people want to have an operation through private healthcare, however, they are told that it could maybe be done before the end of the month. As always, if someone can pay for something, they can have it done. We have these problems within the NHS in Northern Ireland and, I suspect, across the rest of the United Kingdom.

As I said, the World Health Organisation estimates that half the world's population lack access to essential healthcare services and that some 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty by healthcare expenses. Behind these horrifying statistics are tragic human stories of unnecessary loss and suffering. My parliamentary aide, who does a lot of speech writing and research for me, has travelled to Africa to work every summer, usually in Swaziland but also in Zimbabwe over the past couple of years. That is through Elim Missions, which is a church group in my constituency. She used to visit Africa every summer, during the recess, but she now has two young girls and has not been for a few years. When she came home each year, the tales she would tell about the hospitals she visited would break your heart.

Let me tie together these two stories: first, our NHS; and secondly—perhaps this is for DFID—the responsibility that I believe we have to reach out and help other countries. I referred to that in my earlier discussion with the Minister. My aide's stories would really have broken your heart. The children's ward was full of the cast-offs from hospitals in the UK. I do not mean that disrespectfully, because we do that in Northern Ireland—Elim Missions and many other groups do it. We fill containers with second-hand hospital apparatus that might need repairs and we send it out to Zimbabwe, Swaziland and other countries around the world. The equipment can still be used, but sometimes it is worse for wear. We would not put our children anywhere near some of those conditions, but the staff we met made use of all that apparatus and all those materials.

Children in orphanages went without basic medical care until nurses from the UK gave up years of their lives to provide medical training to local communities, for example on the importance of sterilisation. Sometimes the issues can be small, but necessary, such as the simple effect of drops. The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and I were talking this morning about some other things. He said that when he was in Africa his son was taken very ill with pneumonia at eight months old. They did not have the small antibiotic drops that were needed, but once his son got them he became much better and got over the illness. That shows how small things can make a difference and how important it is that we do them.

The Luke Commission is a charity that has been operating since 2005. It takes free healthcare and hope to the most isolated populations in Swaziland. Mobile

hospital outreach sites are set up in the remotest parts of that small country. The population is scattered and dispersed. Patients are tested, counselled and linked to treatment for HIV/AIDS. Swaziland has some of the highest levels of HIV in the whole world, and the whole of Africa in particular. Those suspected of having TB are X-rayed and started on medication. Voluntary male circumcisions are performed in an on-site 11-bed operating room, as studies have shown that the rate of HIV transmission is cut by 60% in circumcised males. Those are practical actions that can be taken to change things. More and more evidence indicates that lack of male circumcision is one of the primary reasons why the HIV prevalence rate is so high. These actions can reduce that. Nurses travel back to rural communities to check on newly circumcised men to ensure that they are healing, to answer questions and to provide HIV prevention education.

At the mobile hospital sites, schoolchildren are treated for skin and intestinal problems. Young people are fitted with new shoes. Those are practical, small things that can make a difference. I put on record my thanks to the Elim church charity and to the many other charities and churches across my constituency that gather products, whether clothes, shoes, medication or hospital apparatus—whatever it may be—to help fit out some of these places in Swaziland, Zimbabwe and further afield.

Handicapped people are analysed by Luke Commission medical personnel and given bush wheelchairs—they need a wheelchair that is practical. Follow-up treatment for patients with HIV, chronic disease, complex medical disease and various cancers is offered. Those with poor eyesight receive vision services and glasses, if needed. There is an ophthalmic surgical programme primarily focused on the removal of cataracts, which are a serious issue in parts of Africa. Those practical changes can be made easily. They do not need a lot of money or investment, but they can change lives. Can you imagine, Mr McCabe, not having your eyesight? Of all the things in the world that you would never want to lose, it would be your eyesight. I say that as someone who has worn glasses since I was eight. I understand the importance.

Packets of medication are distributed by the thousands every day, each prescribed by a doctor with instructions on usage in the mother tongue so that they are understood. Psychosocial and grief counselling is available, too. The pain and the tears they have are no less than the pain and tears we have. Some of the things that happen to them happen because they do not have medical treatment available. The Luke Commission team of nearly 100 people treated more than 61,000 patients in 2015. We can do a lot more with small things, but how many more could we affect?

Most recently, a young lady from my constituency gave up her time during her summer to help the Luke Commission. So many others from the UK give up their time to make a difference. Would the Minister be so kind as to outline the initiatives that are in place? I understand his remit may not stretch to that, but it would be helpful if he could give us some idea. What initiatives are in place to encourage our knowledge and skills to be shared worldwide, like the schemes of Doctors Without Borders and the Luke Commission? How are the Government sharing and disseminating the expertise and learning generated from the NHS with Health Ministers in developing countries?

We have great partnerships and the wonderful NHS. We are celebrating the NHS's 70 years of tremendous work, but we should be trying to show other countries what we can do. Will the Minister give us some idea of how we can help developing countries? I believe that is our duty, and I would like to better understand how we can fulfil it. We need to take up the mantle and do more in our constituencies. We are doing practical, physical and financial things through churches and other charities that directly help in Africa and other countries across the world.

Countries in the developing world are already showcasing their ingenuity and political will in delivering universal healthcare. For example, Bangladesh has achieved wonders in national health in the last 25 years. More than 95% of Bangladeshi children are now fully immunised—that is tremendous. There have been other massive improvements: breastfeeding is near universal, and the level of stunting in children under five declined from 51% in 2004 to 36% in 2014—a significant decrease, showing what we can do if we influence and help both physically and practically. Community outreach by a skilled cadre of female community workers was instrumental in achieving almost universal immunisation coverage, the world's highest coverage of oral rehydration solution, greater uptake of family planning, and innovative solutions for community-based management of sick newborn babies and severe and acute malnutrition.

Bangladesh is a world leader in reducing child mortality, but pneumonia remains a major challenge for policy makers. Sadly, childhood pneumonia is prevalent across many countries. The stats are alarming: every minute of every day, including today, two young lives are lost to pneumonia; in 2016, it claimed nearly a million children under the age of five in developing countries—more than HIV, TB and malaria combined. If we had the antibiotics available, we could tackle a lot of those problems. Pneumonia is a killer that leaves children gasping for breath and fighting for their lives, but it is also a disease that we have the power to prevent, diagnose and treat. We can do that, so how can we do it better to save those million children's lives?

We know that an accessible and free health system is the most effective way of treating pneumonia. A fully integrated universal healthcare model can care for a child from the moment they are born until they reach adulthood. That will prevent deaths from pneumonia, which is the biggest killer. We are here today to find out what more can be done to provide UHC in countries around the world, including those in Africa and the middle east, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries where these problems occur. Millions of people around the world are denied their most basic rights of access to healthcare. We have UHC in this country, and I would like to think that one day we will be able to make it available across the world. As beneficiaries of the NHS, everyone in this room must believe we want everyone to have what we have: a system that is fair and free. We must therefore take steps to change things.

Pneumonia is a prevalent issue within the Commonwealth, too. Save the Children has calculated that children under the age of five living in Commonwealth countries are two and a half times more likely to die from pneumonia than children living in non-Commonwealth countries. When we hear those stats, we realise how big the difference is that we have to try to reduce. Will the UK Government

raise the subject at the next Commonwealth Health Ministers meeting? If the Minister is in a position to use that power, I ask him to do so. He should certainly contact the relevant Department to ensure that it happens. What leadership role can the UK Government play, given that the UK is the chair of the Commonwealth for the next two years? I would like to think we can use that influential role. I know we will, but perhaps we should be reminded that we have that opportunity. We should try hard to make things happen.

I am incredibly pleased to have one of the world's foremost research and medical centres in the wonderful Queen's University. The steps taken in improving healthcare worldwide have been tremendous, including the most recent breakthrough regarding the targeting of antibiotics for pneumonia using groundbreaking cancer treatment technology. I mentioned Queen's at the beginning of my speech, but I mention it again, because it is at the coalface of breakthrough technology. I asked Queen's for a little more in-depth information regarding the breakthrough. That information is certainly something to be proud of. The Queen's research team indicated that our struggle against infectious diseases is far from over, but they, with other universities, research and development bodies and private companies, are doing their best to make things happen. Globalisation has increased the risk of pandemics, which we get regularly, reminding us that whenever we accomplish something, another disease and pandemic comes along, and sometimes existing drugs are useless.

Unsurprisingly, antimicrobial resistance—AMR—is included in the recently released UK Government national risk register of civil emergencies that may directly affect the UK over the next five years. Our Government have been instrumental in assisting and responding, and it is always good that they do that. More than 80,000 deaths in the UK are estimated if there is a widespread outbreak of a resistant microbe. Far from being an apocalyptic fantasy, a post-antibiotic era in which common infections and minor injuries can kill is a very real possibility for the 21st century. We can never rest on our laurels with what we have done. We need to step forward and be more aware of what we need to do in the time ahead. New diseases are always developing, and there is always a need to match them. We should pay respect and give credit to organisations that do that well.

The O'Neill review on AMR sets out the global threat by highlighting that drug-resistant infections already kill hundreds of thousands of people a year globally. By 2050, it could be as many as 10 million—one person every three seconds. If we needed a reminder of the importance of the issue, that would be the figure. I am not sure if anybody in the Chamber will be around in 2050—I certainly will not be—but those who are could well face one of the debilitating diseases that we need to research now.

Of particular concern is the mounting prevalence of infections caused by multi-drug-resistant gram-negative bacteria, in particular *Klebsiella pneumoniae*. That pathogen has been singled out as an urgent threat to human health by the UK Government, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Health Organisation due to extremely drug-resistant strains. Notably, *Klebsiella* infections have increased by 12% in the UK alone over the last five years. That tells us how things are developing, and that we need to be prepared.

[Jim Shannon]

Professor Chris Scott, the interim director of the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology, is an expert in nanotechnology. In June, he teamed up with Professor Jose Bengoechea, director of the Wellcome-Wolfson Institute for Experimental Medicine, who is a world expert on infections by multi-drug-resistant pathogens, chiefly *Klebsiella pneumoniae*. Professor Bengoechea's team discovered that it is possible to use the nanotechnology approaches that Professor Scott is developing for cancer to try to treat the bacteria that reside inside human cells and combat that pathogen. We have to listen to the experts and ask them to take things forward in the right way.

Although there is clearly a need for new antibiotic drugs, which must be the Government's main focus in tackling the potential tsunami of antimicrobial resistance that we face, Queen's research shows that with effective delivery of antibiotics we will gain a better therapeutic effect against a main protagonist of pneumonia. The complex scientific work that Queen's is doing should make a difference. Patients may need to take an inhaler of particles containing antibiotics, as opposed to a simple tablet, in the specific case of pneumonia. It is possible that an advanced formulation of drugs could slow resistance developing in some instances and generate better outcomes for patients. It may also mean that we could extend the useful lifespan of some of our current antibiotics. To take that to patients, we need to prepare clinical grade material, but advanced formulations such as nanomedicine are difficult to manufacture. Life is never straightforward, but when we are given a challenge we have to take it on.

Investment is needed in the UK to provide facilities that can advance these excellent therapeutic strategies before they can be tested on humans. We have a process to go through and we must walk along those lines. When we come to the end of the road, we want to ensure that the medication is appropriate and safe. Additional funding needs to be allocated to new approaches to treat infections. Again, the Minister may wish to tell us how the Government are working through the Department of Health and Social Care with universities, companies and research and development on how that process can work, and perhaps how it can work better.

By thinking outside the box, as exemplified by the Queen's University Belfast research, we will find much-needed new therapeutics. Several projects at Queen's University Belfast are reaching the pre-clinical stage and are being stalled by the lack of investment, since pharma are still not interested in supporting this essential work. There are ways of going forward, but we need a wee bit of security as well. The lady from Queen's University who was here this week talking about breast cancer research was funded through one of the Government Departments in Northern Ireland. Queen's University also gave her a position, which brought her a bit of income. That meant that she could do her research here in the UK, and we in the UK can get the advantage and try to advance that as well. Other UK Government schemes, such as those supported by Innovate UK, also fall short in supporting pre-clinical work because there is still no commitment from pharma. I ask the Minister to consider standing in the breach, if that is

possible, and supplying the necessary support and funding for Queen's and other research centres to help us to do better.

It is expected that by 2035 more than 500,000 people in the UK will be diagnosed with cancer each year. To ensure that our health service can meet future demand, action to prevent cancer and other diseases must be at the forefront of any approach. We have heard today some of the figures, certainly on the mainland in relation to cancer and some of the delays. There are many problems in the NHS, but we are here to help the Minister and to encourage him and the Department of Health to move forward.

The Government must train and employ more staff to diagnose and treat cancers earlier. We can be proud of what the UK Government—our Government—do on healthcare, but we strive to do more, and the Minister strives to do more. The Department of Health is already looking across the world to see how it can share expertise. The Department for International Development is helping countries to strengthen their healthcare systems. What else could we achieve if we joined up the dots and worked together more on implementing universal healthcare?

We should encourage countries to raise their own domestic resources for healthcare, which could have a transformative impact. DFID has been fantastic at supporting the health system to strengthen, but that is not always free, which leaves behind the poorest and most marginalised. I referred earlier to those who are unable to get their operation through the NHS, but are offered the opportunity to pay for it. I am very unhappy with that system; it suits some people, but not everyone. We have to be ever mindful that some of the poorest and most marginalised people in countries across the world are at the bottom rung of the healthcare ladder. We should share our expertise on domestic funding for the NHS with Governments around the world, encouraging Governments to spend more on healthcare.

From 2011 to 2015 there was a cross-Government strategy on global healthcare. An update strategy could include recommendations on domestic resource mobilisation. I understand that the Department of Health has a global health team. It would be helpful to know the remit of that team and how they co-ordinate with DFID on global health issues. What is the connection? Do they have any input to the policy, strategy and the way forward? Do they have regular meetings?

In February 2014, the world watched in horror as Ebola swept across many parts of Africa. We in this country did our bit immediately to respond. We sent our service personnel, our experts and our medication. We were not found wanting, and we never will be. The horror turned to pride as we saw that role that UK aid and our healthcare professionals played in stopping Ebola and saving lives. We should be immensely proud of what our people did, and what our Government did and continue to do. That was the UK Government at their best. They co-ordinated the response to a major global health crisis and supported a country's health system. How well that was done! We owe thanks to those personnel and to our Government for leading the way. We would never wish for Ebola or something similar to return. What can be done to implement that sort of cross-Government approach to supporting health systems?

I thank hon. Members for coming along to support me, and the Minister for coming along to respond. I thank hon. Members for their time. How does the Minister believe we can excel, improve and achieve an even higher level of global care?

2.1 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this debate. It is a thoughtful and appropriate way to mark NHS70. I pay tribute to him for his typically expert and heartfelt speech.

Whatever the difference between our parties and the Governments of the UK on the details of health policy, we all agree about the extraordinary benefits that the national health service brings as a universal healthcare service, and about its immense contribution in tackling preventable and communicable diseases in this country, not just through treatment but through immunisation and other public health measures. I pay tribute to all NHS staff for their immense dedication and service. Like other hon. Members, I have benefited from the NHS's care on many occasions, and I will forever be grateful for that.

As the hon. Gentleman said, that is not to say that the job is done. There are things to improve, but we are fortunate to have been born in a country with such a system, given that so many others are not. In the absence of universal health coverage in some countries, many are excluded from the healthcare they need, sometimes including the most basic care. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, as recently as December 2017, it was reported that at least half the world's population cannot access essential health services, and almost 100 million people are forced to live in extreme poverty simply because of the expenses associated with healthcare.

It is not just a question of finance and infrastructure; it is also about the barriers caused by culture, prejudice and even draconian and inhumane laws. The hon. Gentleman set out some of the tragic consequences for the affected individuals. For example, the terrible incidence of pneumonia among children in certain countries is a tragedy for individuals, for family after family and for community after community. It is also a disaster for those countries' economies and public finances. In short, it is a circle of despair.

That is exactly why the goal of universal health coverage is enshrined in sustainable development goal 3—"health for all"—and is a global priority for the World Health Organisation and other international organisations. In simple terms, that means we need to work towards ensuring access to skilled medical professionals in good-quality facilities. We still have a long way to go even in that regard, particularly in the poorest countries and the remotest areas, where even the most basic of issues, such as access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, remain challenging. Without those things in place, facilities cannot function effectively.

That is not an end to the matter. The goal of universal health coverage will not be realised unless good-quality care is provided without discrimination. There is no point in having facilities and doctors if absence rates among healthcare staff are 60%, as sometimes happens in certain countries. The goal is fatally undermined if

discrimination against the most marginalised people, some of whom are the most in need of healthcare, means that they cannot access its full benefits or that they receive substandard treatment. In short, the goal is not simply universal health coverage but effective universal health coverage.

Disease-specific programmes continue to have a vital role to play, but ultimately diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and many others can be eradicated only by establishing universal health coverage, which we sometimes take for granted in our country. That also means ensuring that HIV services are part of a universal health coverage system. People with HIV can often be among the most marginalised in a country—for example, sex workers and men who have sex with men. That can mean that their ability to pay for treatment is even more limited, and they face additional hurdles, such as culture, prejudice and inhumane criminal laws.

I am not slow to criticise the UK Government when they get it wrong, so it is only fair that I praise them when they get it right. I will do that in a moment. The goal of extending universal health coverage around the world will not be assisted by poorly planned and abrupt withdrawals by the Department for International Development from countries without a proper transition. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact gave an amber-red warning to DFID's transition programmes. The Government have responded to that warning, but it is vital that, as that work is taken forward, DFID ensures that its transition programmes promote UHC and prioritise access to services for the most marginalised communities before it makes its exit.

I recognise that the UK has been a key global leader on this issue in years gone by, and long may that continue. This Government, and any Government, will have our support if they continue to pursue the goals in the universal health coverage 2030 partnership. We need to use the NHS's expertise and experience to help shape new universal systems in other countries. We should continue to use DFID to put other Governments in a position to support such systems and end reliance on charges and out-of-pocket spending. We want the Foreign Office to be used fully to argue for an increase in health spending and an end to draconian criminal laws that marginalise communities and make access to healthcare difficult. We should continue to support efforts to better measure progress on who has access to universal healthcare and the quality of care they are receiving, so that we can check, for example, that HIV treatment is reaching marginalised communities.

We should continue to support non-governmental organisations and civil society in helping people to access healthcare and hold their national Governments to account. We should continue to be a leader in research and development. The hon. Member for Strangford rightly highlighted the work at Queen's University, but universities across the United Kingdom play a pivotal role in researching diseases that affect low and middle-income countries.

We need to work with other countries and the World Health Organisation to create a global road map on access to medicines, and to end what is sometimes a medicines rip-off. That means encouraging the de-linking of research and development costs from medicine prices, and defending the use of so-called TRIPs flexibilities—those under the agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual

[Stuart C. McDonald]

property rights—by low-income countries seeking to access medicines. It would be particularly helpful to hear a bit from the Government about their commitment to pushing for protecting such flexibilities in the outcome document from the forthcoming high-level meeting on tuberculosis, which I understand is to take place in September.

If all that helps to achieve the universal health coverage goal for 2030, then the NHS's 82nd birthday will be an even more significant and happier occasion than its 70th.

2.8 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, on this historic day—the 70th anniversary of the founding of the NHS. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing this important debate and for his passionate speech. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) and the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) for their contributions. Finally, I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting time for this debate, especially on the NHS's 70th birthday.

It is an honour to be here to speak about our NHS and the example it has set for the rest of the world. When introducing the National Health Service Bill to the House of Commons, Bevan said:

“I believe it will lift the shadow from millions of homes. It will keep very many people alive who might otherwise be dead. It will relieve suffering...It will be a great contribution towards the wellbeing of the common people of Great Britain.”—[*Official Report*, 30 April 1946; Vol. 422, c. 63.]

Seventy years on, those words still ring true in the UK. That is why the Labour party will always defend our NHS from Government funding cuts and from ever-increasing marketisation, which opens the door to unwanted privatisation. We remain committed to defending our NHS so that it continues to be the fairest and best healthcare system in the entire world. While we celebrate today, however, it is easy to forget that across the world, as we heard from the hon. Member for Strangford, some of the poorest and most vulnerable people are being denied the basic right to health services that we enjoy and indeed take for granted.

In December 2017 the World Health Organisation reported that at least half of the world's population did not have access to essential health services. It also found that 800 million people spent at least 10% of their household budget on health expenses for themselves, a sick child or other family member, and that for almost 100 million people, the expenses associated with healthcare meant that they were forced to live in poverty.

That widespread lack of access to healthcare contributes to the global epidemic of vaccine-preventable diseases, widespread malnutrition and other health-related problems. Following on from the hon. Gentleman, I shall add some examples to the debate. Globally, 2.6 million children died in the first month of life in 2016, largely due to lack of quality care at birth or skilled care and treatment after birth. More than 20% of births throughout the world still take place without the presence of a skilled birth attendant, and in sub-Saharan Africa that figure rises to more than 40%.

Pneumonia is now the biggest infectious killer of children, claiming nearly 1 million lives each year, or two children every minute. Pneumonia is preventable and treatable; that so many children are dying because of it is shameful. Globally, only 4% of HIV-positive people who inject drugs have access to HIV treatment, and that also increases the risk of HIV transmission among those who use drugs. Behind such awful statistics are tragic human stories of unnecessary loss and suffering. When we invest in health, we invest in people, no matter where they are in the world.

Universal health coverage means that everyone can receive the healthcare services that they need without the worry of suffering financial hardship. It can therefore protect countries from epidemics, reduce poverty and the risk of hunger, create jobs—as we know, the NHS is the biggest employer in the country—drive economic growth and enhance gender equality. Given the world-class reputation of our NHS, the UK Government have a huge part to play in encouraging other countries to establish universal health coverage, and we should be proud that we have such a prestigious role in leading the way on health.

I am pleased that the Government are committed to delivering the UN's sustainable development goals, which include universal health coverage. Indeed, we should all be committed to ensuring that people live healthy lives, no matter where they live. Will the Minister tell us whether his Department has worked with other Governments from around the world to promote universal healthcare coverage? Which countries has he worked with on that?

Public Health England has developed a global health strategy to look into building public health capacity, particularly in low and middle-income countries, as well as sharing excellence by working in partnership and building on the UK's strengths. Does the Department of Health have any plans to develop a global health strategy with a specific focus on universal healthcare coverage? Does the Department have regular conversations with Public Health England and colleagues in the Department for International Development to discuss universal healthcare coverage and how to promote it around the world?

Seventy years ago everyone in the UK was granted access to free healthcare, regardless of how much they earned or where they lived. Sadly, millions around the world are still missing out on access to such a basic human right, and people are dying because of it. It should be the ambition of us all on this special day to ensure that that right is enjoyed by everyone around the world. I support the Government on any aims that they might have to do that.

2.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): I am sorry for my musical chairs during the debate, Mr McCabe, but I could not hear everyone from the end of the Chamber—I think it is my age and the heat. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for, as always, an interesting speech. I congratulate him, especially today—birthday day—on securing the debate in his residence of Westminster Hall. He mentioned that he might still be here in 2050—I would almost hazard a wager with the hon. Gentleman about that one, but I hope we shall all still be here.

Was not 5 July 1948 a pivotal day for our country, with the inauguration of healthcare free at the point of use for all our citizens? Seven decades later, the NHS remains one of our nation's most loved institutions. The NHS is often described as the closest thing we have to a national religion, and this lunchtime a service in Westminster Abbey proved the point. The NHS is one of our country's crowning achievements, possibly the crowning achievement—along with the English football team, of course—and it is the envy of people across the globe. When I travel around the world in this job, people are fascinated by and envious of the NHS in equal measure.

As has been said by my shadow, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), and everyone else who has spoken today, the NHS is of course nothing without its fantastic staff, who show such a level of Christian compassion—some without even knowing it—day in, day out. More than 1.5 million people work each day to provide the best possible care for our constituents.

The questions that the hon. Member for Strangford asked are important. We are the proud owners of an excellent universal healthcare system, albeit one we continually strive to strengthen, as we must—the best friends are prepared to criticise, and the NHS is not above criticism in our struggle to make it better—but he asked what we are doing to share our experiences. I shall certainly be able to cover that point.

The health of UK citizens is not dependent only on action in the UK. Diseases do not respect borders, and we need to act internationally to protect ourselves as well as to help others. Not only is that relevant when an outbreak hits—recently we had an Ebola outbreak, which I have monitored closely—but we must keep working with other nations to strengthen their capacity to prevent, detect and respond to diseases. UHC is critical to that. Threats such as that of antimicrobial resistance, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned in his opening remarks, can be tackled only through global action.

There is much that we can learn from each other. The NHS has evolved a huge amount since the late 1940s, and the next 70 years will require ongoing adaptation and innovation as we deal with the challenges of 1 million more over-70s—the ageing population—and further reap the rewards of scientific advancements, which have been so central to the NHS in its first 70 years. Other countries develop innovative approaches that we may not yet have considered—it is not all about the great empire of Britain, telling the rest of the world how things shall be—and there are plenty of challenges that no one has yet cracked. We should work together, and we do. It is right that we support others who have not yet achieved universal health coverage to do so, including by sharing our experiences.

We are committed to delivering the sustainable development goals, which the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) mentioned, including SDG 3. That is crucial to tackling many other health challenges, including the improvement of maternal, newborn and child health, as he said, and specific diseases such as TB, HIV, malaria and—everyone rightly mentioned this—pneumonia, the single largest infectious cause of death in children worldwide.

Universal health coverage is a goal, not a blueprint. Country needs, plans and perspectives are central to our work, and we have no interest in imposing an NHS

model. It is crucial for each country to find its own path to UHC, which may entail greater private sector involvement, if that is what the country wishes, or a national health insurance scheme if that is what the politicians are brave enough to do. That is not our choice, but it is the choice in some parts of the world. We cannot just go with our judgment in trying to help other countries achieve universal health coverage.

Poorer, marginalised populations must achieve better access to good-quality essential services without the risk of financial hardship, as we choose in our NHS. Support for UHC must also involve helping countries to achieve sustainable funding mechanisms for their system, whichever they choose. The countries in greatest need deserve our financial support, but the ultimate goal must remain to transition to domestic funding, so that countries can maintain health systems in the long term.

The UK engages on UHC in a number of international forums. We strongly support the World Health Organisation's focus on UHC through its new general programme of work, and we provide funding through a number of DFID programmes. We engage on this topic at governing body meetings and our annual UK-WHO strategic dialogue. I have a good, open and direct relationship with the head of the WHO, as part of my responsibility for international health at the Department of Health and Social Care. Underpinning the WHO's success is a strong and effective organisation, and the UK continues to promote reform of the WHO so that it is the best it can be. As the second largest donor to the WHO, we are in a very strong position in that regard.

We promote UHC as a priority in other forums such as the G20 and the G7; I attended the G7 Health Ministers meeting last year in Milan. We were pleased to see strong commitments on health in the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, including on eye care, which I am passionate about. We will continue to follow up with the Commonwealth secretariat on the implementation of everything that was agreed in London. The high-level meeting on UHC at the UN General Assembly in 2019 will be an important opportunity to share experiences and to drive greater collective action. I will pass on the hon. Gentleman's request, which I agree with, for us to use our chairmanship of the Commonwealth to further the UHC agenda that we all believe is so important.

My Department has rightly taken on a global leadership role on patient safety, along with our German and Japanese counterparts, to whom I spoke directly at the G7 Health Ministers meeting last year. Hon. Members will know that patient safety is the central mission of the Secretary of State. It is crucial to universal healthcare—as the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East rightly says, the aim cannot just be universal healthcare but must be good-quality and safe universal healthcare. Providing access but not quality care is not truly delivering on the sustainable development goals. We hosted the first global ministerial summit on patient safety in 2016, bringing together political leaders and experts to galvanise action on this crucial issue. Subsequent summits in Germany and Japan have continued that legacy.

Another key but often overlooked facet of universal health coverage is addressing mental as well as physical health. Again, my Department is taking an international

[Steve Brine]

role: we will host the first global ministerial mental health summit in October. The summit will bring together political leaders, experts by experience, policy makers and civil society to share innovative and effective approaches to mental health care, which the Prime Minister has rightly said is one of her main priorities. The Department of Health and Social Care frequently receives ministerial and official delegations from overseas to look at topics as diverse as childhood obesity, on which we lead the world; emergency response, as we often send people around the world; and elderly care.

The international team, which the hon. Member for Strangford mentioned and which I look after, manages the Department's bilateral and multilateral engagement, working closely with colleagues at DFID and across Government. The team also leads on co-ordinating global health strategy across Government and on the health implications of trade and of the UK leaving the European Union.

The hon. Gentleman asked about our support for low and middle-income countries. The UK has a number of programmes with those countries. They are largely led by DFID, although a number draw on my Department, the NHS and Public Health England, for which I have ministerial responsibility. The UK supports the aim of countries working towards universal health coverage, with priority given to ensuring that poorer, harder to reach populations achieve better access to good-quality essential services without risk of financial hardship.

We apply a health systems strengthening approach to all health investments. That includes addressing global health security issues such as antimicrobial resistance; scaling up nutrition interventions, which are about building up country resilience; improving reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health; and targeting specific diseases such as HIV, TB and neglected tropical diseases. One of the first things I was able to do in that space was to speak at the family planning summit organised by DFID over the road at County Hall, which was backed by Bill and Melinda Gates, about our record in driving down the teenage pregnancy rate in this country. Of course, getting reproductive health right often helps developing countries to make their health systems more robust and sustainable.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the delicate subject of male circumcisions and HIV. He is right to say that circumcision is practised across many parts of Africa to prevent HIV. The WHO and the UN consider male circumcision to be effective in HIV prevention, where there are heterosexual epidemics and high HIV and low male circumcision prevalence. However, the practice provides only partial protection. The procedure should not be seen as a green light to risky behaviour; it should be one element of a comprehensive HIV protection package. It would be remiss of me not to mention that I get a lot of letters on this subject. A number of campaign groups in this country and around the world make arguments about the human rights elements of the matter, especially when children undergo circumcision surgery, and its impact later in life. It is important to recognise all those facts, but the hon. Gentleman is right to mention it as part of the toolkit used in certain countries, Tanzania being one of the most prevalent.

We provide support directly to countries, work through the WHO and scale up targeted, cost-effective preventive and treatment interventions through global initiatives such as the global health fund, Gavi and the global financing facility. We are the largest donor to Gavi, which provides developing countries with pneumococcal vaccine to protect against the main cause of pneumonia. Between 2010 and 2016, 109 million children received the vaccine; we estimate that saved about 760,000 lives.

The health partnership scheme is another good example of how the UK can use our expertise overseas. Since 2011, we have trained 84,000 health workers across 31 countries. The scheme relies on volunteers from the NHS who help to support the training of staff overseas and benefit themselves through gaining new skills and motivation. Last October, the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who I work closely with across Government, announced the new £30 million programme with the catchy title "Stronger Health Partnerships for Stronger Health Systems". It will run for five years from 2019 and will support partnerships between leading UK institutions and those in developing countries.

One of the benefits of being the Minister in these debates is that sometimes I can mention the good things that happen in my constituency. Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which covers the Royal Hampshire County Hospital in Winchester and the Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital, has two very good international links, including with Yei in South Sudan, where a number of medical professionals from that trust have worked on antibiotic resistance studies, looking at the bacteria that can cause pneumonia. In collaboration with the Rotary Club in Winchester and the Brickworks, which is a Winchester-based charity, it has secured funding for textbooks to repopulate a midwifery and lab training institution and funding to build schools for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, so that refugee children can continue their primary and secondary education. There will be examples in the constituencies of Members throughout the House of health professionals using such expertise as part of their upskilling, but also to help those less fortunate than us.

The UK offers development opportunities for the medical workforce globally. The medical training initiative allows overseas medical specialists to train in the UK for up to two years, to see our system close up, so that they can return to their home country and apply their skills and knowledge to the benefit of their population. Of course, that benefits the NHS by providing extra staff, who we desperately need, and enhances the clinical capacities of health systems in low and middle-income countries. We estimate that just over 3,300 overseas doctors have taken part since 2009. I know the House will be interested in that positive programme.

We are passionate about tackling AMR, and we are committed to doing so. My Department is working across Government with a wide range of stakeholders to refresh our AMR strategy, which rightly gets a lot of attention in the House, with a view to republishing it at the end of 2018. I know that the hon. Member for Strangford will be interested in that. One of the ambitions we set out in response to Lord O'Neill's independent review of AMR, which was established by George Osborne when he was at the Treasury, was to halve

healthcare-associated gram-negative bloodstream infections. We are focusing on *E. coli* infections this year, but we are also collecting data on *Klebsiella* and *Pseudomona* pathogens.

I think there will be a lot of interest among Members in the refreshed AMR strategy. Health Question Time seldom goes by without AMR being mentioned. AMR is important. As the chief medical officer, who is busy in other ways today, has said, it is one of the greatest threats, if not the greatest threat, that our world—not just our healthcare world—faces.

We welcome all new research that contributes to our work to tackle AMR—especially great research such as that produced by Queen's University Belfast, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. There are a number of funding opportunities, and high-quality proposals are always welcomed. He rightly mentioned that people from Queen's were at the House yesterday. He and I met them together—we had our photo taken with them—at an excellent Breast Cancer Now event, which was a great chance to hear about some of the incredible research that is being done on that disease in our United Kingdom.

Great research projects often start with relatively small grants from charities such as Breast Cancer Now, which act as the building block for other researchers to jump on board and get with the plan. That is very important. This is not all about the Government starting research projects; it is about institutions such as Queen's being world-renowned. The lady I met yesterday was clearly on top of her game. She deserves great credit, and I thank her and all her colleagues at Queen's for the work they do for our country.

We have strong join-up across Government. My Department, DFID, Public Health England and the Foreign Office in particular take a “one HMG” approach to global health, which was recently praised by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact. That includes regular meetings between Ministers, and a co-ordination group of senior officials meets very regularly to look strategically at our international activity and some of the programmes I mentioned. It includes joint delegations to WHO meetings and daily contact between our officials. It also includes joint working on projects such as the UK public health rapid support team. That is a partnership between the Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health England and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine that, at countries' request, deploys people rapidly to some of the poorest

parts of the world to investigate significant disease outbreaks and support capacity building. I mentioned examples of times when that has been invaluable, such as during the Ebola crisis.

In concluding, let me return to the incredible achievements of our NHS over the past 70 years, during which time life expectancy has leapt. Its staff work tirelessly to ensure that it remains the best in the world. We are committed to ensuring that it provides universal health coverage in the UK for generations to come, but we do not keep it all to ourselves—we are desperately keen to go on sharing our knowledge to help other countries do the same, so that people around the world can benefit from the incredible privileges we have in this country.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Mr Shannon, would you like to make some concluding remarks?

2.34 pm

Jim Shannon: I certainly would, Mr McCabe. I thank you for chairing the debate so well. I also thank the hon. Members for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald)—my pronunciation is probably all wrong—and for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), whose contributions were immense. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) highlighted important issues with the BCG vaccine.

I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response. He always says that he is pleased to be in his position because he has a deep interest in the subject, and that was illustrated by his responses to everyone who spoke. He was right to say that we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the NHS and its excellent work, and to focus on what we can do both here and around the world. I am glad he mentioned the importance of remembering, whenever we think about diseases and healthcare in this country, that we also have to prepare for the diseases that come into the country from outside. We have a joint approach, in which the NHS delivers great healthcare here and we share that healthcare around the world. For that, we are eternally grateful.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the role of universal health coverage in tackling preventable and treatable diseases.

2.36 pm

Sitting suspended.

Equal Franchise Act 1928

[Ms KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the 90th anniversary of the Equal Franchise Act 1928.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I rise to mark an important date in British history: 90 years ago, on 2 July, this House ratified the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928. For the first time ever, women were afforded equal rights to men in formal political participation; for the first time ever, women over the age of 21 and women who did not meet arbitrary property qualifications were eligible to vote; and for the first time ever, women made up the majority of the British electorate.

According to the Electoral Commission, in 2017 women were four times more likely than men to cite people fighting to win them the right to vote as a motivation for casting their ballot. Three quarters of women say that they always vote in general elections. This year we rightly celebrate that it is 100 years since some women, through tireless sacrifice and struggle, attained suffrage in the UK, but it would be wrong to forget that many other women—around a third—had to wait another decade to participate fully in this country's democracy.

During that decade, feminists made advances in their campaign for gender equality across different sectors of British society. On 1 December 1919, Lady Astor became the first woman to take her seat in Parliament. On 23 December 1919, women successfully lobbied Parliament to enact the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919, which prohibited women's exclusion from most forms of employment and allowed them to obtain professional employment in any civil or judicial office. In 1920, women were finally afforded the privilege of being able to obtain a formal degree from the University of Oxford, despite having already contributed to its structures and studies for decades.

However, most working-class women did not have the opportunity to stand for political office or to seek professional employment in the judiciary or other such posts, and they certainly did not have the resources to study at any university, let alone Oxford. In fact, during the early 20th century the working class had few opportunities indeed. For that reason, the last century saw the intensification and politicisation of workers' rights and the growth of the trade union and socialist movements whose values form the very foundations of my party.

Even by the time Ramsay MacDonald became, albeit briefly, the first ever Labour Prime Minister in January 1924, working-class women could still not vote. It pains me to imagine how much more could have been permanently achieved if more than one third of our population had not been disenfranchised for so long and at such a crucial time in the history of the British working class. Would we be further along the march to true equality? Would I still have needed to hold this debate?

Because of the hesitant start to the full enfranchisement of women and the working class, even today many of us in this room will have experienced, from a young age,

a world that has not always been particularly inclusive or fair to women, minorities, the working class or, broadly speaking, those deemed to be “others” in society.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate to mark the 90th anniversary of women attaining equal voting rights to men. Unfortunately, there are still some women who, because of their circumstances, feel unable to vote. One example is survivors of domestic abuse who feel unable to register because they do not want to risk their safety. They may not be aware that, thanks to the Electoral Commission, they can register anonymously. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should pay tribute to the charities, groups and organisations—including the Dash Charity and Hestia in my constituency—that work for women's empowerment and support victims of domestic abuse?

Rosie Duffield: Absolutely. I am a champion of Hestia, so I know of its brilliant work. The Electoral Commission is making sure that women know that their vote is theirs alone.

While on this important date we note the lost potential and the pain caused by sexism and injustice, we also celebrate the tenacity, bravery and resolve of those who fought tooth and nail against the status quo to reverse the injustices of patriarchy, classism and all forms of discrimination. We must also look at what more needs to be done in the struggle for equality. Working-class women may have attained the vote, but many barriers remain to equal political participation and representation, and equality in all aspects of modern life.

This year has seen a number of cross-party initiatives launched to combat the gender pay gap, seeking to remedy an age-old economic injustice faced by women, much like the political disenfranchisement faced by the suffragettes. However, similar to the disparity faced by working-class women in the 1920s, working-class women and minority ethnic women are far more affected by the inequality of the gender pay gap than their middle-class counterparts. Recent Library research shows that women as a whole bear 86% of the costs of austerity, with working class, disabled and minority ethnic women disproportionately affected by cuts to public services and welfare.

I do not say that to create a rift among different groups of women or to sour the mood on this landmark date, but to remind us that it is our duty as parliamentarians to ensure that all women are adequately represented, both in this place and across the UK. On that note, I have learned since my arrival here a year ago, which I have really taken to heart, that those of us privileged enough to be in this place really are women first and partisan politicians second. We need—indeed, want—to work together to improve women's lives and the future for girls growing up in this country.

It would not be right to celebrate without recognising that we still have a long way to go in our fight for equality. For example, we know that almost 52% of the UK population is female, yet we still make up only one third of all Members. As a representative of the excellent campaign group 50:50 Parliament, which was started by my brilliant friend, Frances Scott, I understand only too well how far we still have to go to achieve a true representation—or simply an accurate picture—of our nation's population.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. The first general election in which women could stand as candidates was in 1918; then, one female stood in Wales. Last year, 66 candidates in Wales were women, but only 11 of Wales' 40 MPs are women. Does she agree that we still have a long way to go to achieve parity with our male colleagues?

Rosie Duffield: Absolutely. I am sure that the Welsh Government are doing their bit.

When the debate is reported and shared on social media, I know for certain the comments that will be made, because they always are. Men will type, "Why can women only be represented by women?", "Why do we need more women?" or, "What difference does it make?" as well as other rude comments that I cannot say. I will tell them why. Do we really think that debates leading to legislation and policy change that focus on issues only or mostly affecting women would be on the Order Paper at all without the growing number of us here? Issues brought to the House by my colleagues in recent years include period poverty, the provision of affordable childcare, maternity leave, the gender pay gap, abortion rights, domestic violence, stalking and sexual harassment to name just a few. Could we really have left those issues in the hope that hundreds of male Members would one day stumble upon them and take them forward on our behalf? No.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that another example of that is the campaign of the Women Against State Pension Inequality? Without those women having the franchise and being able to raise their voices electorally, and without all the women MPs in Parliament, that issue would not be in the public domain in the way that it is.

Rosie Duffield: Absolutely. I was happy to meet some of my local WASPI activists yesterday on Parliament Square.

We know that men would not have taken those issues forward because they did not in the hundreds of years that they had this place to themselves, so we came here and did it ourselves. A recent and important Bill on upskirting was almost totally stopped in its tracks. It was tabled by a female MP, the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), and was talked out by a male MP, the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who frankly made a mockery of our Parliament and completely shamed himself. A female Minister is now taking the Bill through the House as the Voyeurism (Offences) (No. 2) Bill, in a Bill Committee made up mostly of women.

Sadly, women still often face societal discrimination and sexism in their everyday lives. Misogyny is rife and in full health. Rather than being consigned to history, it sits at the heart of even current legislation. One particularly disgusting example that is never far from my mind is the so-called two child policy: the epitome and very definition of sexist, disempowering, discriminatory and degrading prejudice towards ordinary working women who are, unlike most people here who get to create the policies, struggling to just get by. That particular policy would not have seemed so out of place 90 or 100 years ago

before we marched, starved ourselves, chained ourselves to fences, broke the law, fought back and refused to give in until we got the right to vote.

Although many things have changed, and mostly for the better, so many other things really have not. We have to make sure that the change is not simply on the surface. Women must continue to fight for our rights, for equality, for a seat at the table and a voice in the decision-making processes—not only white, wealthy and middle-class women but working women, disabled women, black and minority ethnic women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender women; women from all cultures, all religious faiths and every financial background. We must support each other, encourage one another and keep looking around the table to see if we are all represented.

One way in which we can practically commit to that aim is through cross-party solidarity on enacting and fully implementing section 106 of the Equality Act 2010. Section 106 would ensure that all political parties adequately report on the diversity of their candidates, allowing us to scrutinise discriminatory practices and hold parties to account when they fall short of what is necessary for real and true equality. This is an initiative recommended by the Women and Equalities Select Committee, the Labour party's shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), the Fawcett Society, CARE International and many more.

Today in the Chamber we were due to debate proxy voting. Two weeks ago, a few of our women MPs, one seriously ill and two very heavily pregnant, were forced to go through the crowded voting Lobbies, which caused them considerable physical discomfort as well as being an extremely unpleasant experience. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) describes it in an article in today's *Guardian* as,

"degrading, humiliating and downright horrible."

I agree with her when she says,

"It should never have happened."

That practice needs to change as soon as possible, and proxy voting is one option that would put an end to such practices. We need and want to encourage more women to come to this place, and some women have babies.

If we are serious about women's representation and about celebrating the legacy of those fearless women who so vociferously fought for our right to stand here today, we must do our bit to ensure that those who wish to stand here do not face the barriers that many of us have had to. Ninety years ago, working women like my grandmother and great-aunts and their peers who served, cooked and laundered for the local landowners got to have their say. Our job here is to speak for those who are still not here but need to be, and to hold the doors of Parliament wide open to welcome them in to take their rightful place beside us.

3.12 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): It is an absolute pleasure to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Ms Buck, and to speak under your chairmanship. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for securing the debate and giving us all the opportunity to talk about this issue today. She treated us to a really excellent

[Lyn Brown]

contribution, which I look forward to reading in *Hansard*, because she touched on so many salient and important current political points.

I want to talk about the history of all women in this year of feminist anniversaries. The centenary of partial suffrage for women is important, but the centenary that means most to me will come in 10 years' time. The women of my family were unable to vote in 1918, 1922, '23 or '24 because they were working class—they did not own property and they were not married to a man who owned property. As my hon. Friend has said, more than half the adult women in the UK were denied suffrage for a decade longer.

My family were proud of the right that they won. I was told at a really early age that they did not care who I voted for—as if!—but I had to vote. Only by voting would I respect the fight and the sacrifices made to secure my franchise. We sometimes forget that the story of suffrage is not just middle-class and white. Suffrage fighters were black, Indian, and disabled, like May Billinghurst, who once used her wheelchair as a battering ram to escape a police cordon when she had been trapped by a group of men.

Mr Dhesi: Does my hon. Friend agree that individuals such as Princess Sophia Duleep Singh are often left out of history and not celebrated as much as some of their counterparts, and that that is something that we need to remedy in our history?

Lyn Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning Sophia Duleep Singh. She was indeed a doughty fighter, and all too often women like her have been written out of our history. He does us a great service by bringing her name into the debate.

Above all, for me, suffrage fighters were working-class. The first branch of the Women's Social and Political Union was opened in my constituency in Canning Town, where my family lived. It was opened by Sylvia Pankhurst, but equally by the working-class women Minnie Baldock and Annie Kenney, who was a mill worker. It is fair to say that the Women's Social and Political Union had become quite autocratic over time and the leadership appeared increasingly intimidated by the strength of the heavily working-class branches of east London, so those branches were expelled, along with Sylvia Pankhurst, and they formed the new East London Federation of Suffragettes.

The success of the group was massive. They organised among workers, including more than 5 million women who worked in factories during the first world war. They fought against deprivation in working-class communities, opening free milk depots for mums with young children and canteens that served affordable, nutritious food. That was so important then—and sadly now. They even opened a co-operative toy factory that paid a living wage. It included a crèche and, unsurprisingly, it recognised the needs of working mothers. At the time, working women were generally on poverty wages in munitions factories or they were sewing uniforms at home. However, the east London suffragettes stepped up their support for working communities and refused to allow the war to stop their campaign, continuing to build momentum for genuinely universal suffrage when others had, frankly, given up.

It is true that Sylvia Pankhurst's socialist convictions were important to the movement but, as she recognised herself, it was the working-class women who were key. She said that working-class women were:

“not merely the argument of more fortunate people, but...fighters on their own account, despising mere platitudes...and demanding for themselves and their families a full share of the benefits of civilisation and progress.”

She was proved right. After she had been imprisoned and was weak from force-feeding, it was the women of the east of London who offered her protection.

Jo Stevens: Does my hon. Friend share my view that although it is brilliant to see the statue of Millicent Fawcett in Parliament Square, it would be as good to see a statue of Sylvia on Clerkenwell Green?

Lyn Brown: I certainly do, and perhaps we could do something about the Payne family, who took Sylvia in when she was weak. The Payne family came from Old Ford, which is kind of Hackney, kind of Tower Hamlets, and kind of Stratford—so that makes it mine—and they were shoemakers. Police officers tried to surround the house that Sylvia was in, but they were confronted by really strong women who simply stood firm and resolute and refused to move. Special branch officers attempted to bribe the women to withdraw and to allow them to use their rooms for surveillance. They offered decent money, but every single woman and family, I am proud to say, stood firm and refused to accept the bribes. They refused to move. I believe that, if the East London Federation had not put working-class women first, the anniversary that we are celebrating today would have taken much longer to achieve.

Those women stood on the shoulders of the match women who went on strike. They were from the same area and of the same stock. History is clear: the match women's success in organising for themselves and fighting for their rights inspired London's east end dockers to do the same. Those women were the wives, daughters, sisters and mothers of the dockers who went on strike the year after. The match women did not plead for inclusion in the labour movement, because they created it. They organised, fought and won against massive odds. They were instrumental in founding a political labour movement that continues to fight for fair pay and conditions for all Britain's workers today.

I am happy that people know about those events through the wonderful work of the amazing historian Dr Louise Raw, whose sixth successful annual match women's festival took place last Saturday. Louise and I have been campaigning for a proper memorial for the match women at the Bryant and May factory site in Bow where they worked. Progress is slow, but I am glad to tell the sisters present—and the brothers—that I reckon we will make it within the next 12 months. We have strong support from residents, historians and activists.

We are making some progress with recognition of our history as working-class women. However, Members will agree that we have a way to go, because in the east of London we have a Jack the Ripper museum that glamorises misogynist murders and turns the working-class women victims into mere props. At the same time, one of the victims, Annie Chapman, is buried in a pauper's grave in Newham, and one of the match women's leaders, Sarah Chapman—no relation, as it happens—is

buried just a few metres away. Those are the stories that we need to tell and remember. Those are the people we need to memorialise—not a sad, sick man.

Why do we have a Jack the Ripper museum? The building was originally supposed to be a celebration of east end women but, according to newspaper reports, the developers lied. The travesty of the Ripper museum in Cable Street, of all places, may have a positive outcome yet, because the campaign for an east end women's museum is stronger than ever. The campaigners aim to secure a permanent home for their exhibitions, which they expect to open in 2020. They are still talking about putting the museum in Barking—but I still have my dreams.

Learning about our history is important, because unless we know where we come from and who we are, it is hard to know where we can go. The history we talk about today can play a part in inspiring a new generation. Remembering our past helps us to understand our present and imagine our future. If more people knew about the true contribution of working-class women to the suffrage and labour movements, and the rights and prosperity in this society today, they would be less likely to overlook the amazing women who do that same work now. The potential that my working-class sisters have is enormous. They need the recognition and the space to achieve it.

3.24 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for securing the debate. She is a woman I am proud of, as I know many Members are.

It is vital in such a debate not only to celebrate the achievement of the 1928 Act, but to remember the stories of the women and fighters who campaigned for it and who won the battle for electoral reform, suffrage and equality. It is 100 years since some women got the right to vote—not all of them, but some. It was a good step forward. People often get confused between the different Representation of the People Acts. Were it not for the fantastic Voice & Vote exhibition in Westminster Hall, it would be easy for Members of Parliament, too, to be confused about when each piece of legislation was passed, and what it meant.

In 1918 the vote was given to some women—only those at the top of society. The 1928 Act gave the vote to all women over 21, rather than those over 30 who were landowners. That was a huge step forward, and it meant that 52.5% of the electorate in the 1929 general election were women. That was transformative. The fact that it took 10 years—two whole Parliaments—fully to extend the franchise shows just how scared the establishment was of giving proper representation to women and the working class across the UK.

I pay tribute to the incredible campaigners who continued to make the case for the legislation. Many gave up their freedom, faced imprisonment or went on hunger strikes. Many, such as Emily Davison, gave their lives for the cause, but the campaigners never gave up. They are an inspiration to all of us in this House and we pledge ourselves to further their cause. The story is often overlooked.

In Plymouth we are proud to be part of the suffragette story, and of the fact that the suffragette movement there was not just one of rich women campaigning for

the vote. The women took things into their own hands. Members may be familiar with the beautiful Smeaton's Tower on Plymouth Hoe. That lighthouse still stands proudly, but the suffragettes put a bomb in it and tried to blow it up. They wanted to attract attention to their cause. I am glad that the lighthouse still stands, but the story of how local women in Plymouth resorted to those means to try to gain attention and credibility for their cause should continue to be talked about.

I want to talk now about Nancy Astor. As my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury said, the story of how we reached the point where only a third of our Parliament are women started with Nancy Astor taking her seat in 1919. She represented Plymouth Sutton and was introduced to the House of Commons flanked by Balfour and Lloyd George. It will be the 100th anniversary of her election—and of Plymouth's voting for a woman—in November 2019. She and I would disagree fundamentally on nearly everything. She stood for many things that I could not stomach, countenance or go along with, and I am sure that that would be the case for nearly every Member. We would not share her views on slavery, anti-Semitism, fascism and LGBT equality, but her story, the fact that she was the first woman to take her seat in this place, and the fact that Plymouth was the first place to elect a woman who took her seat means we are intimately entwined in the story, which we must keep telling.

There are far too many girls and young women in schools in Plymouth and across the country who do not know about Nancy Astor. I do not want her political views to be advocated; I want the story of brave women, many of them standing alone, doing brave things and pushing the boundaries for women in general. She was initially known as the Member of Parliament for women, and we should talk about her role. There should be debate about the good and bad sides of all politicians. The first step that she took is important. It may seem odd for me as a Labour MP to speak here about a Conservative MP—especially one I fundamentally disagree with—but we need to tell the story. It frustrates me that the story of women in our politics is not told. We hear about men, and occasionally about the women standing behind them. We need to break that, and we can do so only when we—men in particular—start to tell the story. We cannot leave it to women to tell the story of women in politics. It is for all Members of Parliament, male and female, to talk up the role of women in Parliament.

Mr Dhesi: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. As to women pushing boundaries, does he agree that women, and especially those from ethnic minorities, are often not given much credit for their accomplishments? The first black lady mayor in the country, Lydia Simmons, was elected in Slough. She was an inspiration for many, yet often such individuals do not get the credit they deserve.

Luke Pollard: My hon. Friend has proved my point precisely that we need male MPs speaking up as well as female MPs, and I thank him for taking the advice so quickly.

I recently visited the superb Voice & Vote exhibition in Westminster Hall. I pay tribute to the House authorities for putting it on. It really is a superb exhibition, and

[*Luke Pollard*]

hon. Members who have not visited need to take the time to do so. They will notice that one exhibit is Nancy Astor's dress, on loan from Plymouth museum. She picked the dress because it looked like a man's suit; it looks like a double-breasted suit. Beside it is a little plaque explaining that she chose it because she wanted people to judge her by what she said and not for what she wore. It is therefore somewhat ironic that 99 years later I stand here, as one of her successors, talking about her dress and disagreeing with all her words, but perhaps those are the joys of democracy.

Parliament was a very different place when Nancy Astor became a Member. *Voice & Vote* tells us the story of a system that did not welcome women to Parliament. It did not afford them the equality and credibility that they deserved by virtue of their election. We can see that in the fact that in 1929 there was only one coat hook in the Lady Members' Room for eight female MPs. That was simply unacceptable. However, there is still far too much that the women at that time, Nancy Astor included, were fighting for that we are still fighting for today.

Nancy Astor was not afraid to stand up for herself as a woman, even in the face of power. She had an incredibly canny sense of humour, and people who have spent time in Plymouth will know many stories about her. I will touch on just a few. In particular, I want to touch on her relationship with Winston Churchill. Many hon. Members will know one story about it, but there were so many glorious clashes between them. Apparently, Churchill once told Nancy Astor that having a woman in Parliament was like having one intrude on him in the bathroom, to which she retorted, "You're not handsome enough to have such fears." She is also said to have responded to a question from Churchill about what disguise he should wear to a masquerade ball by saying, "Why don't you come sober, Prime Minister?" But perhaps the most famous exchange, which I am sure all hon. Members will know of, is the one in which Nancy Astor said, "Mr. Churchill, if you were my husband, I would poison your tea," to which Churchill replied, "Madam, if you were my wife, I would drink it."

So many stories are told about Nancy Astor, but so few are told about many of the other fantastic female MPs for Plymouth. I want to single out Lucy Middleton, who was the MP from 1945 to 1951 and a real tower of strength in the trade union movement. She is not remembered enough by my party in Plymouth, or by all of us here. Sadly, she lost her seat, to a male member of the Astor dynasty, Jackie Astor, in 1951, but it is good to see her name on the wall of female MPs in the *Voice & Vote* exhibition, because there is so much more that needs to be said in that respect.

One thing that frustrates me every time I come to Parliament—and that helps keep alive in me the fire so that I do not become accustomed to or cushioned by this place—is looking around the rooms in which we have our meetings and seeing all the old white men in wigs staring down at me. This place has a problem, because nearly every room—except, perhaps, this one—has too many pictures of men, too many pictures of old men, and too many pictures of old, white, rich men on the walls. Where are the women? Every single one of these rooms should have 50:50 representation. If there

are not the paintings of women from our political history, commission them or borrow them and put them up. Take down those images of old white men, so that when young children from Plymouth come to visit Parliament they see pictures of people who look like them. Let us also ensure that there is not just male and female representation. Let us ensure that we have on our walls LGBT heroes, black, Asian and minority ethnic heroes, and disabled heroes. This place looks far too much like the old stale white male club that it sometimes was in the past.

We can change that. We need to do it by speaking up about equality. We need to continue to be restless about it to ensure that we keep fighting the misogyny that we see in our politics, in our parties and in our society. We need to give a voice to the single parents, to the WASPI women and to those people who are standing up for equality and want a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. That is what we all need to do. We can all do our bit to ensure that we get there by telling the story of women in politics, and the 1928 Act is a really important part of that. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury still being in this place in 10 years' time to lead the debate on the 100th anniversary of that Act.

3.34 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for securing the debate. I will start my contribution by remembering Margaret Bondfield. Margaret was a shop worker and union official from Brighton who was foundational in extending the franchise to working-class women. She was the first woman Minister and the first woman Privy Counsellor, and she was a Labour MP.

As a campaigner for women's suffrage, Margaret was part of a broader labour movement with other working-class suffragettes, fighting for all women to have equal rights with men. This year, of course, marks 90 years of the equal franchise, but it is also the centenary of the unequal franchise for women—that is probably what we should call it. Ten years previously, the Representation of the People Act 1918 was passed to give middle-class and upper-class women the vote. For Margaret and the millions of other working-class women, that meant one rule for the rich and another for the poor. A third of the least well-off women could not vote.

We cannot look at gender separately from class. The fight for suffrage and equality is a difficult journey. Margaret, after years of condemnation and even imprisonment because of trade union activities, understood that the struggles of unionisation and feminism went hand in hand. Let us be clear: it is thanks to the many sacrifices made by Margaret and fellow suffragettes that the struggle for gender equality has been transformed into law. Change can happen only when ordinary people organise together to fight to shape their future. We must remember those women who fought to shape their future, and in doing so helped others. We cannot forget either those who stood in solidarity with the suffragettes. Of course, male Labour MPs such as Keir Hardie and George Lansbury resigned their positions and faced imprisonment on this issue as well.

The struggle for gender equality has not yet been won elsewhere in the world, and sometimes the fight takes place vociferously on the streets as well as in parliamentary

chambers. Earlier this year, I went to northern Syria, where I met the People's Protection Units, the YPG, and the YPJ, the Women's Protection Units, of the Kurdish fighters. They are not only fighting the Islamic State in the middle east, but building a feminist revolution, in which all positions are held jointly by women and men. Women hold 50% of all the positions in their organisation—that is better than we do in the UK. There is still a lot to learn. We must remember and show solidarity with the YPJ fighters and other feminist fighters around the world. Those women take up not only the torch against persecution and disenfranchisement, but the fight for a global humanity and against the fascism of ISIS. They remind us that each battle takes us a step closer to equality.

This year, of course, we have seen erected in Parliament Square the statue of Millicent Fawcett, who lived in Brighton and whose husband was the first non-Conservative Member of Parliament in Brighton. On the plinth are 58 names, but there are many more names that we must remember. Today, however, some of their greatest achievements of progress are being rolled back—progress not just for women, but for those with disabilities, LGBT people and BAME people. Severe cuts have landed disproportionately on women and ethnic minorities. Since 2010, 86% of the money raised from Conservative tax and social security changes has come straight out of women's pockets. And of course the introduction of voter ID harms working-class women of colour the most.

The Young Women's Trust found that young women are especially likely to be on low pay and in insecure jobs. One sixth of young women have been on less than the minimum wage, and almost half are worried about job security. The Office for National Statistics says that half a million young women are workless. Despite most wanting jobs, they cannot afford to work because of lack of childcare, direct discrimination, and lack of support to find jobs.

We cannot stop fighting for women, especially when, I believe, this Government are not doing enough; nor can we ignore the central role of working people in demanding social change. These rights are hard-won not by asking nicely, but by feminists' and working class people's continued commitment to equality. A campaign of equality will always find its home in the Labour movement.

When Margaret Bondfield and fellow suffragettes joined the labour movement to fight for equality, they found a home in the Labour party. Sewing machinists such as Rose Boland and Sheila Douglas, who fought for what became the Equal Pay Act 1970, found their home in the Labour party. Today, women make up half of our shadow Cabinet. A third of Labour Members are women—more than any other political party. Labour has always led the way in guaranteeing women's representation through our party structures, but it still needs to do more internally, and I think other parties do, too.

We will always welcome those demanding social change for what they believe in. Equality fighters will always have a home in the Labour party. In Brighton we have a campaign to commemorate Liberal and Labour party women on blue plaques around our city this year. We hope to have a statue of the first suffragette to die, who was from Brighton, erected in Brighton. I believe every town should have a statue of a woman, because, as my

hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) said, there are far too many representations of men, not only in Parliament, but in our communities. Those struggles and fights will have a home in the Labour party. I hope that local Labour parties and other parties will fight for that across the country.

3.41 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I thank the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for bringing this debate to the House and giving me the opportunity to speak on the subject today.

We have spent a lot of time this year marking the anniversaries of universal suffrage. Every time I think about this, what I find remarkable is not how long ago it was, but how recent. The beginning of the 20th century was an age of modernity—there were motorcars, aeroplanes, radios and televisions; there were new advances in thinking in science and technology; there was an avant-garde movement in the arts, architecture and music. Yet while all that was happening, half—in fact, more than half—of our population were denied the basic political rights given to the other half. On reflection, that is a monstrous injustice, and the fact that it could have existed for so long while our modern constitution was being shaped is a source of great shame, and a black mark on our collective history.

Universal suffrage had been a long time coming when it happened. I have spent some time recently looking at the political agitation of the late 18th century, from Thomas Muir in Scotland to Thomas Paine here and Wolfe Tone in Ireland. They were agitating for universal suffrage—basic political suffrage—in an age when there was none. The role of women was alive and present in those debates. Since we have time, I want to read for the record the opening lines of a poem by Robert Burns, written in 1792:

“While Europe's eye is fix'd on mighty things,
The fate of Empires and the fall of Kings;
While quacks of State must each produce his plan,
And even children lisp the Rights of Man;
Amid this mighty fuss just let me mention,
The Rights of Woman merit some attention.”

That shows that in 1792 there was a live discussion about the political rights distributed among men and women.

The exhibition just outside this Chamber in Westminster Hall shows that throughout the 19th century there was agitation, in the Reform Acts of the 1830s and driving on throughout that century. People were asking for reforms for a very long time. It is hard to imagine now the political organisation of men in this country and the degree to which that patriarchy practised misogyny and exclusion. It is quite phenomenal that it took so long—decades and generations—for these most basic of reforms to be achieved.

Having the right to vote is an end in itself, but increasing the franchise and bringing women into the electorate and then into Parliament achieved many other great ends. In particular, it overcame much exclusion, inequality and discrimination that pervaded every aspect of social policy. Even in the period 1918 to 1939, there were many advances in social and economic legislation, to the betterment of women and our society, and the task continues today. It is sad that we have to admit this,

[Tommy Sheppard]

but it is a fact that there is a correlation between the involvement of women in the rules that govern our society and the effect those rules have on sexual inequality.

I hope we are nearing the end of this process. I hope we are getting to a situation where we have genuine equality and where our public policy is genuinely equal, but as colleagues have said, we are still at it. Government policy today still has a worse effect on women in our society than on men. The welfare cuts fall mainly on women. The rape clause means that women now have to prove that they have been raped to get child benefit for their third child. The WASPI inequality—I think that all of us would agree that men and women should have equal pension rights—was brought in in a ham-fisted way. The denial and breaking of an obligation and guarantee given to so many born in the 1950s is a monstrous act of Government policy. Those things are still with us today.

Luke Pollard: The mistakes made with the WASPI women—not informing people about changes—are still happening today with the change in universal credit. If women transitioning with their families on to universal credit have more than two children, they are not being told that they will lose the benefit after the two-child cut-off. The opportunity of WASPI is to learn the lessons and to help women with three children especially to understand that cuts are coming for them. That is not being done by Government at the moment.

Tommy Sheppard: Indeed. It would probably be unfair to expect the Cabinet Office Minister to respond to that point on behalf of the Government, but perhaps she will commit to take it back to discuss with colleagues.

It would be remiss of me to speak on behalf of the Scottish National party without saying something about the many great women who have contributed much to the politics not just of Scotland but of the United Kingdom as a whole. I shall mention only three: in 1967 Winnie Ewing tore the establishment apart by winning the Hamilton by-election, surprising everyone in British politics and beginning 51 years of unbroken representation by my party in this place; in the following decade Margo MacDonald did the same in not one but two by-elections, upturning the political firmament and in many ways creating the conditions that have led to the modern political dynamic in Scotland now; and of course Nicola Sturgeon, our First Minister in Scotland, who has been a beacon, an inspiration and a role model for young women in Scotland and throughout Europe and the modern world.

Nicola Sturgeon presides over one of the few Cabinets among Governments that is gender-balanced, made up half of women and half of men. It has been praised as a role model by the United Nations. The Scottish Government are also moving forward in many other respects to improve the representation of women in public life, setting targets and quotas for representation in our public board rooms, hoping to encourage the private sector to follow suit.

There has been a big debate about quotas—whether they are a right and proper thing and whether they genuinely advance women or are in some ways unnecessary or patronising to women. My experience is clear: quotas are a way of breaking the inertia and stasis that surround

the existing system. It is a way of asking and answering a question about whether women are capable of doing the job. When given the chance, they are not just capable but in my view more capable than their male counterparts. That is the experience of the Scottish Government in action, which the rest of the United Kingdom might choose to learn from.

Jo Stevens: The Labour party has the highest proportion of female MPs, which has been achieved through all-women shortlists—a mechanism that was put in place to make that change. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that similar mechanisms should be put in place across all political parties?

Tommy Sheppard: Yes. I am not saying that we should necessarily copy the Labour party rulebook, but a similar objective and similar mechanisms should certainly be put in place. We have something similar in my party, although not for every seat. Many seats that we do not hold are designated as all-women shortlists so a female candidate is selected. In Scotland, that has resulted in 43% of the governing party, my party, being women—still not 50%, but further forward than many other parties can boast of. Those policies have obsolescence built in, because once they have achieved the desired effect, they are no longer necessary.

As we reflect on the 90th anniversary of universal suffrage and the 100th anniversary of the beginning of votes for women, we should also consider what we can do across the globe as an international player. In many countries, the rights of women resemble what they were in this country 90 years or 100 years ago. That needs to be built into our foreign policy much more—again, I do not expect the Cabinet Minister to respond to that—so that our relationship with other countries is conditioned and qualified by the way in which they treat their citizens and particularly women in their societies. We should not have beneficial relations, roll out the red carpet or sign arms deals, or whatever, with countries that manifestly practise discrimination within their own borders. That would bring long-overdue principle into politics and Government policy and, as we look forward on this anniversary, it would be a practical contribution that we could make to celebrate the gains already made and recognise how much still needs to be done throughout the world.

3.52 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Buck. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on securing this important debate. It has been great to listen to all these names, which are now in *Hansard* in perpetuity, and know that we have done our bit to recognise working-class women who have been, and are still, often ignored.

In history, working-class women, the poorer suffragettes, were referred to as “women quite unknown”. My hon. Friend mentioned how few opportunities there were for working-class women. She talked about inequality and the gender pay gap, and the way that they are still poorer female citizens. She also mentioned 50:50 Parliament, which we campaign on with Frances Scott, who is here today. We need to ensure that upskirting and revenge porn become sexual offences so that women who suffer do not have to make themselves publicly known.

How can we achieve all that in this day and age? We can all play our part. We can use inclusion riders, like actors who say, “I will not star in a film if it does not involve diversity in its pipeline and creation.” We have also talked about various sections of the Equality Act 2010. I hope that when the Minister responds, she might be tempted to announce that the Government will enact section 1 of the Act, which would force public bodies to take into account socioeconomic disadvantage when making policy decisions. If we had more consideration of that when policies were being developed, we would see fewer policies like the third-child policy, and fewer policies like those under which 86% of cuts fall on the shoulders of women and black, Asian and minority ethnic women suffer more than any other group.

My hon. Friend also mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), who is recovering. The proxy vote debate, which was supposed to be today, has been postponed. I had hoped that all the women MPs who were ready and poised to speak would come to this debate to at least listen or even make their speeches, because then they would not have been wasted.

There were many great contributions to the debate, and I will touch on a few. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) flew the flag for working-class women, the different types of women and the strength of east London women, which I can obviously attest to. She gave a voice to the match women and talked about the leaders of those times, who were buried in paupers’ graves after all their struggles.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) talked about Nancy Astor and how we have to talk about the journeys of women, even those we disagree with. Of course, I often talk about women I disagree with and the policies they make. Their story deserves to be told, just like everybody else’s. It is important that we stand up for other people’s rights. Let us imagine how quickly we would move towards equality if all men spoke about the rights of women, all white people spoke about the equality of black people, and all straight people spoke about LGBT+ people. We must all play our part in speaking up for equality, because we all play a part in each other’s journey. As Martin Luther King said:

“I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) spoke about Margaret Bondfield, the first female Minister under Labour, which made me think about all the firsts that Labour has achieved. I would like to read them out, but there are so many that it would take at least an hour, and I do not have that much time. Some of them are to be celebrated: we have had the first black female MP, the first lesbian Minister and the first black female Minister—that is me. There are also some sad firsts, such as Maureen Colquhoun, a Labour MP who was born in 1928, who was gay and outed by the *Daily Mail*, which still happens today. Newspapers still think that that is okay, which shows how far we have to go.

We also heard some great interventions about 1950s women. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), who is no longer in his place, for wearing the colours of the suffragettes in his turban. He talked about Princess Sophia Duleep Singh and the hidden histories that have been ignored or forgotten, which this debate has shined a light on.

Poorer women were treated worse than middle-class women. They were treated more brutally by the police, prison wardens and magistrates. As I said, I am pleased that we are recognising them. To remember them and their struggle is to remember our own struggle and to adopt their struggle as our own.

As has been said, alongside the growing women’s suffrage movement was the women’s labour movement, which included groups such as the Women’s Protective and Provident League, the Co-operative Women’s Guild, the Women’s Trade Union Association and women in the young Independent Labour party, which would probably be known as Momentum today. Those women were referred to as “radical suffragists”. I cannot see what was radical about them, apart from wanting equality. However, those “radical suffragists” included people such as Sarah Reddish, Ada Nield Chew, Helen Silcock and Selina Cooper. Those women mobilised other women in the trade union movement—in fact, they mobilised almost 30,000 people to sign a suffrage petition, and that was without the internet, Twitter, Facebook, mobile phones and WhatsApp.

Ada Nield Chew said that if the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies’ request had been granted in 1884,

“the entire class of wealthy women would be enfranchised”,

but, as she added,

“the great body of working women, married or single, would be voteless still”.

That message rings true with me. The radical suffragists, as they were known, began to move away from the NUWSS, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham spoke about. That reminded me of something that I did recently. I was a member of a women’s WhatsApp group, but I became so frustrated with trying to get members of that group to understand and consider the intersectionality of women that in the end I left the group, and I was not the only one to do so. It did not feel radical to leave that group; it obviously just entailed the click of a button. However, it reminded me of those powerful working-class women and it made me realise that the fight for recognition of, and equality for, all women is a constant struggle. We have to talk about it and fight for it constantly, otherwise we will be dragged backwards. That is really a stark realisation, because I would have hoped that we would have progressed.

I cannot confirm or deny whether I joined a new radical women’s WhatsApp group, but those working-class women broke away and formed “Womanhood Suffrage”, or the Women’s Social and Political Union. The WSPU’s strapline and objective was:

“A vote for every adult woman, regardless of whether she owned property.”

When working-class women fight, they fight for everybody; they do not just fight for a select group. That is a lesson that truly still needs to be learned in some feminist circles. What those women were fighting for sounds really simple now; it does not sound radical to me at all. As my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury asked, if all women had received the vote earlier, how far towards equality would we be now? We might not even be having this debate.

As we have heard, the first march was from east London, and it included trade unionists such as Minnie Baldock, Sylvia Pankhurst and Dora Montefiore, who were working-class women using their non-working day

[Dawn Butler]

to march. They worked six days a week and on the one day that they were not working they marched to Westminster and back. In a way, it can be said that working-class women committed more, in that they sacrificed more. They had the daily struggles of life. They had no home help; when they left to march on that one day off, they had to go back home afterwards and do everything else that they needed to. They had less time, less money and less formal education than many others, yet still they fought, and fought for everybody. They fought for food, they fought for their rights, they fought for dignity and respect, and they fought for every woman's rights. And they were known as radical—I really do not get it.

Later, the WSPU was taken over by wealthy women, and it moved away from its roots in the labour movement and the trade union movement. It became ineffective and it was too far removed from its roots; some people would say that has been repeated in some circles. However, Sylvia Pankhurst reclaimed the movement, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury that we should perhaps see a statue of Sylvia Pankhurst. Not all women were up for the fight. Some women described the working-class women's movement in this way:

“A working women's movement was of no value—working women were the weakest portion of the sex...their lives were too hard, their education too meagre to equip them for the contest.” That was an insult, but let us hope that we are moving forward.

The fact is that the Representation of the People Act 1918 enabled the representation of less than half the adult women in the UK. However, the Equal Franchise Act 1928 was literally equal. Women fought not only for the right to vote but for economic and social rights, through the labour movement and the trade union movement. We are still fighting for those rights today, as we have heard from many hon. Members.

To forget the place of working-class women, disabled women and black women in history is to be complicit in the misogynistic class war, and to forget the interconnectivity of the Labour party and the labour movement in that is to do a disservice to the truth. In this day and age of fake news, the truth has never been so important, so it is vital that we correct the record and put on the record the names of these working-class women at each and every opportunity that we get.

This year saw the first statue of a woman in Parliament Square, and I am thankful to the Mayor of London for making that happen. There are about 58 or so names of women, mainly those of working-class women, around the plinth. However, I would like to see a statue of Sarah Parker Remond, the only black woman known to have signed the Representation of the People Act 1918. I am pleased to say that the Mayor of London and his team are meeting me to discuss that proposal. While I am there, I might even put in a plug for a little statue of Sylvia Pankhurst, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) suggested.

Our job here in Parliament is to give a voice to the voiceless.

Luke Pollard: When I first got into Parliament, I tabled a question to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, asking what the official figures were for the number of men and the number of women

represented in statues and other public art. However, the UK Government do not keep those statistics. I think we should. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should encourage Ministers to start recording equality in our public art, so that we understand the scale of the challenge ahead of us?

Dawn Butler: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and I absolutely agree, because only then will we be able to measure how far we have come and what still needs to be done.

Lyn Brown: While my hon. Friend is advocating on behalf of the statues that we could build, maybe we could have a statue that had some of the working-class women around it, such as Minnie Baldock and Annie Kenney; maybe they could stand shoulder to shoulder with the other women she wants on the plinth. Maybe we could have a really big platform with lots of women from the suffrage movement standing tall.

Dawn Butler: How amazing would it be to walk around different parts of London and the country, and see statues of women, and learn about their history, and know that we have made that happen? People always bang on about Britain having had two female Prime Ministers. Well, we have a female Prime Minister—I am not saying that I want statues of the female Prime Minister going up all around the place, but I am saying that the female Prime Minister can make the decision. She can say, “Right, I will give the money for this to happen, so that we can embrace our rich and colourful and socialist history”, because our job is to give a voice to the voiceless and to uncover the hidden stories. Should I have missed out the word “socialist” there? [Laughter.] Our job is to put a name to “A.N. Other” and to “Anonymous”, to ensure that history becomes herstory, and that herstory paints a true picture of a moment in time.

Working-class women fought for all women, so when women of today fight for the select, privileged few, I find it hard to refer to them as feminists, and when they use their voice to amplify their privilege and ignore the cries of the less fortunate, I find it hard to support the cause wholeheartedly. I hope that in time people will use their power and privilege for progress. People often talk about the legacy that they will leave behind; I think that we need to talk about the foundation that we will leave behind. Women who are on the ladder of success should leave behind them the foundation for an escalator, and the women who are on the escalator of success should leave behind them the foundation for a lift, so that those women who come behind us get to that destination, quicker and more smoothly.

4.9 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): May I say how pleased I am to have you presiding over us today, Ms Buck? I will make a few remarks before ensuring that the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) can wrap up the debate. I begin by thanking her for bringing forward this debate on the 90th anniversary of the Equal Franchise Act 1928. I am delighted to play my part in recognising that milestone. I will set out some of the work that the Government are undertaking to mark the anniversary and our plans for ensuring that all citizens feel empowered to be part of democracy as we enjoy it in this country.

Jo Stevens: Will the Minister give way?

Chloe Smith: Perhaps the hon. Lady should give me a chance to get started, but go on—make it good.

Jo Stevens: The Minister specifically mentioned allowing people to participate in democracy. Would it not be a wonderful thing on this anniversary to give 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote?

Chloe Smith: The hon. Lady will need to wait for another 90 minutes in another Westminster Hall debate for the full discussion on that.

I thank the hon. Member for Canterbury for her commitment to equality for all members of our society. I am aware of the work she does with the 50:50 Parliament campaign, and I pay tribute to it. I am glad she shares my view and the Government's view that no one in our society is more important than anyone else. Every individual, no matter their gender or background, has an equal role and, in relation to my particular brief, an equal right to vote.

As a fellow female parliamentarian, it is important to acknowledge the efforts of the brilliant women who paved the way for us to be here today. I thank the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) for beginning the Back-Bench contributions with an exposition of the history that is at play here. It is important to think about the past as we consider our present and our future. Without the tireless efforts of those women and the men who championed their cause, perhaps most of us in this room would not have a voice in society, let alone in this place. I am proud to be part of the present, when we have the most diverse Parliament in British history, but there is a lot more to do.

We all welcome such initiatives as the 50:50 campaign, the #AskHerToStand campaign and Parliament's own Vote 100 project, which make the goal of gender balance a long-needed reality. I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) for reminding us that progress needs to be encouraged and supported internationally.

This week is National Democracy Week, which has been timed to coincide with Monday's important anniversary. Many of the events happening up and down the country will be highlighting the role played by those who fought for equal voting rights, which included women from a diverse range of backgrounds. Our goal in running National Democracy Week has been to reach out to citizens from all backgrounds, especially those from groups less likely to be registered to vote. I am very passionate about that.

I understand, respect and acknowledge the arguments that have been made today about the difference between 1918 and 1928. In this year of suffrage, which encompasses both those anniversaries, it is valid and important that we test those concepts and have that debate. I would like to acknowledge that in my remarks.

The Equal Franchise Act 1928, which is what we are here to discuss, is as significant today as it was then. It cemented in law that no matter whether someone was a woman or a man, they had the right to vote on equal terms. We are celebrating that 90th anniversary in a number of ways, including the National Democracy Week awards, which were held in Manchester on Monday. They kicked off the week and were a fantastic way of recognising the exceptional work of individuals and

organisations helping others to be involved in democracy. Just today, a "Women in Politics Hackathon", supported by the Leader of the House and run by Shout Out UK, brought girls and young women to Parliament to work on creative ideas to get more women into politics.

This year the Government Equalities Office has provided £1.5 million for the women's vote centenary grant scheme, which has already provided funds to 140 projects across the country. As a Minister at the Cabinet Office, I am delivering projects under the "Educate" theme of the suffrage centenary programme. The projects are being developed to increase knowledge of UK democracy and its importance among young people in particular, but not exclusively. It includes those from ethnic minorities and under-registered groups, so as to widen democratic participation.

Increasing participation has been facilitated by the Government's commitment to making registering to vote more straightforward than ever before. In 2014 we introduced individual electoral registration alongside a digital service, and as a result we have seen record numbers on our electoral register, which reached 46.8 million people before the 2017 general election. I wonder what that might have looked like to someone looking ahead from 1928.

We are committed to making the service more accessible. For example, I am pleased to say that we are working with Mencap on an easy-read guide. Historically—I say this as a passing point of interest—figures suggest that women have been more likely to be registered to vote than men, with recent research on completeness of registers suggesting a 2% difference in the rates for women and men.

Last December, the Government published their democratic engagement plan, which sets out the ways in which we will tackle further barriers to democratic inclusion. I was pleased that the hon. Member for Canterbury widened her argument at the start and set the tone for the debate, because in many ways the issue goes beyond just gender. That gives me the chance to note that we have set up an accessibility of elections working group along with Mencap, Scope, the Royal National Institute of Blind People and many others, through which we are working on how we can make our registration and electoral systems and processes as smooth and secure as possible for people with specific conditions or disabilities.

The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), who is no longer in his place, was right to reassure people that our recent changes to the anonymous registration system have made it easier for victims of domestic abuse to register to vote while protecting their right to remain anonymous. Those changes, which of course were welcomed by Women's Aid and many others, will make it easier for an estimated 12,000 survivors of domestic abuse to register to vote without their name or address appearing on the roll and without the fear of former partners finding their address. I would like the message to go out loud and clear that that has been done, and I hope it is already making victims' lives easier.

I was struck by some of the words the hon. Member for Canterbury used about the grotesque abuse that may follow her introducing the debate. She was right to draw that point out. I will shortly launch a consultation on intimidation in public life, which, as the Committee on Standards in Public Life noted, is directed disproportionately at female candidates for public service.

[Chloe Smith]

I hope we can work together to improve the way our electoral law protects debate and welcomes everyone into democracy.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) reminded us in his helpful remarks outlining the life and times of Nancy Astor that we should respect difference. I am delighted that hon. Members spoke so well about their political traditions, and I shall take the licence the hon. Gentleman offered me to speak about mine. I remind hon. Members that the first woman to sit in the House of Commons was indeed that Conservative, Nancy Astor, and we were the first party in the western world to elect a female Prime Minister. Here we are on our second, while the party in opposition is yet to have a female leader.

Dawn Butler *rose—*

Chloe Smith: Is the hon. Lady the next leader of the Labour party? I hope so.

Dawn Butler: I am not, but let me correct the Minister. We have not had a female Prime Minister, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) was a female leader of the Labour party.

Chloe Smith: I am happy to stand corrected, but I still raise the hon. Lady two Prime Ministers to one Leader of the Opposition. I also raise her the Prime Minister who passed the Equal Franchise Act 1928—the Conservative Stanley Baldwin—and pay credit to Emmeline Pankhurst, who, had she not passed away before the election, would have contested a parliamentary seat for the Conservative party.

Turning to other matters in women's lives, under this Conservative Government there are more women in work than ever before. The female employment rate is at a record high of 70.9%. Under the last Labour Government, female unemployment rose by 25%. Let us not forget that that represents nearly 1 million women. We are encouraging all companies to do more to eliminate the gender pay gap by publishing their data, improving their pipeline to ensure progress on female representation at senior levels, and making flexible working a reality for all employees. We introduced shared parental leave—my husband and I took it ourselves, and we agree that it is extremely important. I would love to see others taking it up as well.

Other political points were made that neglected to give the entire picture, so let me make a few more economic points before concluding. In Government, we have introduced tax-free childcare, providing working families with up to £2,000 per child per year. We have introduced universal credit, and increased support to 85% of childcare costs, 15 hours of free childcare a week for families with disadvantaged two-year-olds, and an additional 15 hours of free childcare every week to working parents of three and four-year-olds. We will be investing around £6 billion in childcare every year by 2020—more than ever before. That is the Conservative reality.

Furthermore, the increase in the national living wage in April from £7.50 to £7.83, with more to come, represents an increase in a full-time minimum wage worker's annual earnings of more than £600. We all know

that a higher proportion of women than men are expected to benefit from that increase, so there is no glass ceiling in the Government's approach to improving the lives of all women in society. We practise what we preach—improving female representation and creating equal opportunities in the workplace.

I will leave time for the hon. Member for Canterbury to wind up. I thank her again for securing the debate on this important anniversary. We should use such opportunities to promote participation and work together, combining our traditions and interests and coming together to use our powerful positions in this place to deliver a democracy that is more accessible, inclusive and representative.

4.21 pm

Rosie Duffield: Thank you, Ms Buck, for allowing me to lead today's debate and for chairing it so brilliantly. I thank all hon. Members who stayed here on a horrible hot Thursday afternoon instead of going back to their constituencies. It is great to hear the Minister pledge to do so much for democracy, and to hear about the Government's plans. Obviously Opposition Members will keep a close eye on those things.

I thank all Members who made contributions. I have learned a lot about the east end women. I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) that the Jack the Ripper museum is abhorrent. I cannot wait for us to find a space where we can celebrate the lives of the east end women permanently, rather than having to shift about all the time. It would be nice to have the money behind that that this horrible other place seems to have.

Dawn Butler: Does my hon. Friend have any comments about women who are on zero-hours contracts, the gig economy and the rise in women among the working poor?

Rosie Duffield: Absolutely. Under the last Labour Government I was able to work and bring up my children as a single mum. Without tax credits, I would have had no hope. I would have been living with my parents, with my children in one room, unable to feed them easily. The last Labour Government made the lives of women a lot easier and a lot better, and introduced childcare and all sorts of things that get forgotten and overlooked. Yes, a lot more people are in work, but a lot of them are working for companies such as Deliveroo and McDonald's on a very low wage. The childcare issue is a huge and growing problem, and nurseries are having to close.

It is worth saying that there is not equality. Working women are still the working poor, as the shadow Minister just mentioned. Zero-hours contracts do not help anybody, so there is still much to do to get equality. As some Members have said, we also must not forget our sisters around the world. Although we think we have done equality and feminism, we have not. We need to keep going, look around us, and do as much as we can for everyone.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the 90th anniversary of the Equal Franchise Act 1928.

4.23 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 5 July 2018

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

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 be at the forefront of new technologies and emerging industries in the years ahead. The construction sector is fundamental to our economy as we invest in our future; building the homes and infrastructure we rely on.

The construction sector deal aims to drive a substantial improvement in the productivity growth of the sector in the coming years, by increasing the use of digital and offsite manufacturing technologies, creating new jobs and training the workforce in new skills, and supporting UK firms to exploit export opportunities in a rapidly expanding global construction market. The deal will support the development of affordable, easy to construct homes, schools and other buildings which can be quickly and sustainably manufactured offsite and then assembled when and where needed. The deal will boost the delivery of the Government's ambition to build 1.5 million new homes by 2022.

The construction sector deal will deliver:

£420 million of investment to transform construction through developing and commercialising new digital and offsite manufacturing technologies for construction, which will aim to reduce the cost of new buildings by a third, and halve the time taken to deliver them;

Cheaper energy bills for families and businesses—supporting the industrial strategy clean growth mission to halve the energy use of new builds by 2030;

25,000 construction apprenticeship starts and 1,000 construction T-level placements; and

Supporting the UK construction sector to compete in the global market for infrastructure which is worth US \$2.5 trillion a year.

With almost half of the economy reliant on the built environment and the services it enables, this deal brings together the construction, manufacturing, energy and digital sectors to deliver innovative approaches that improve productivity in the construction sector and accelerate a shift to building more efficient, safer, healthier and more affordable places to live, work and learn.

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 in partnership, 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 with the nuclear sector deal announced last week, and we look forward to building on this in the months ahead.

I am placing a copy of the "Construction Sector Deal" in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS831]

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

General Affairs Council: 26 June 2018

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): Lord Callanan, Minister of State for Exiting the European Union, has made the following statement:

I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) meeting in Luxembourg on 26 June. A provisional report of the meeting and the conclusions adopted can be found on the Council of the European Union's website at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2018/06/26/>

Enlargement and stabilisation and association process

Ministers agreed Council conclusions on enlargement policy and the stabilisation and association process. Subject to progress on rule of law reform, the Council set out the path towards opening accession negotiations in June 2019 with Albania and Macedonia, which I supported.

Preparation of the European Council on 28 and 29 June 2018

Ministers prepared June European Council by discussing the draft conclusions issued on 25 June. On migration, Ministers exchanged views on internal and external migration, the reform of the common European asylum system and measures to strengthen the EU's external borders.

On security and defence, Ministers discussed EU-NATO co-operation, permanent structured co-operation (PESCO) and the European defence industrial development programme. I supported the draft conclusions on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats which were issued as part of the response to the attack on Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury on 4 March. I also welcomed the inclusion of language in the draft conclusions on measures to counter malign cyber-activity.

In discussions on jobs, growth and competitiveness, I highlighted the UK's concerns surrounding proposals on investment screening. On the response to the US decision to impose tariffs on the EU for aluminium and steel imports, I supported the measures that had been taken and welcomed calls to avoid the further escalation of this situation.

Ministers also debated digital and innovation matters, external relations and the multiannual financial framework.

European semester

In accordance with the European semester process, Ministers approved country-specific recommendations (CSR) on the economic and social outcomes which member states will work towards over the course of the following year. The Council is expected to formally adopt the CSRs in July.

Interinstitutional agreement implementation

Ministers reviewed the implementation of the interinstitutional agreement on better law-making (IIA BLM) and considered the work that has been carried out during the first half of 2018.

Rule of law in Poland/article 7 (1) TEU reasoned proposal

The Council held a hearing under article 7 (1) treaty on European Union. The Commission set out its concerns on the judicial reforms enacted by the Polish authorities. In response, Poland provided a detailed presentation which set out the context and content of the reforms and highlighted the political sensitivities. Thirteen member states asked Poland questions and Poland responded. The presidency confirmed that Ministers would return to this matter at future meetings of the GAC.

[HCWS833]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council: 25 June 2018

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence, the right hon. Earl Howe, and I attended the Joint Foreign Affairs Council (FAC). I also attended a meeting of the FAC for Foreign Ministers only. The Council was chaired by the High Representative and Vice-President of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP), Federica Mogherini. The meeting was held in Luxembourg.

Security and defence co-operation

Foreign and Defence Ministers discussed EU security and defence co-operation, permanent structured co-operation (PESCO), military mobility, the European defence fund, the European peace facility, the fight against hybrid threats, and the importance of strengthening the EU's resilience to such threats and civilian capability development.

The Council adopted conclusions on security and defence. It also adopted a decision setting out governance rules for projects undertaken under PESCO, and approved the overarching high-level part of the military requirements for military mobility within and beyond the EU.

EU-NATO co-operation

Ahead of the NATO summit on 11 and 12 July, Foreign and Defence Ministers exchanged views on EU-NATO co-operation with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. Against the background of challenges in the transatlantic relationship, Ministers underlined the continuing good collaboration on security and defence between the EU and NATO. Ministers also highlighted the important progress made on the 74 concrete actions implementing the July 2016 joint declaration between the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the NATO Secretary-General. Ministers encouraged further co-operation, in particular on military mobility and on countering hybrid threats.

Yemen

Ministers discussed Yemen with the United Nations (UN) Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, who briefed them on his peace plan. Ministers exchanged views on ongoing EU efforts and explored ways to strengthen the UN-led process. The Council adopted conclusions on Yemen.

Horn of Africa and the Red sea

The Council discussed and adopted conclusions on the horn of Africa and the Red sea. Ministers highlighted the strategic importance of the region for the EU. They expressed their support to efforts aimed at the creation of an organised and inclusive regional forum for dialogue and co-operation around the Red sea.

EU global strategy

The Council reviewed the implementation of the EU global strategy based on the second implementation progress report. Ministers welcomed the important progress made.

Jordan

The HRVP reported back on her recent visit to Jordan. Ministers expressed their strong support for Jordan as one of the countries most affected by the crisis in Syria. Ministers took stock of EU-Jordanian relations including socioeconomic co-operation under the EU-Jordan partnership. They expressed the importance of maintaining a high level of support to Jordan which faces a critical time both politically and economically and highlighted the importance of supporting the new Government to continue economic and social reforms.

The Council also agreed a number of measures without discussion:

The Council adopted the EU priorities at the UN and 73rd UN General Assembly;

The Council adopted conclusions on Sahel/Mali;

The Council adopted the decision on the signing and provisional application of a protocol to the Euro-Mediterranean agreement establishing an association between the EU and Israel to take account of the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the EU;

The Council placed seven individuals under restrictive measures in light of the situation in Myanmar/Burma;

The Council extended the mandates of six EU special representatives for Bosnia and Herzegovina, central Asia, horn of Africa, Kosovo, Sahel and the south Caucasus, and the crisis in Georgia;

The Council decided to put 11 individuals holding official positions under restrictive measures who are responsible for human rights violations and for undermining democracy and the rule of law in Venezuela;

The Council approved the progress catalogue 2018;

The Council adopted conclusions on EU co-operation with cities and local authorities in third countries.

[HCWS832]

Petitions

Thursday 5 July 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 Redditch constituency,

Declare 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 guidance 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 Rachel Maclean.*]

[P002176]

The petition of residents of Taunton Deane,

Declare 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 guidance 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 Rebecca Pow.*]

[P002177]

The petition of residents of North Somerset constituency,

Declare 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 guidance 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.]

[P002178]

Ministerial Corrections

Thursday 5 July 2018

HOME DEPARTMENT

Refugee Family Reunion

The following is an extract from the response by the Minister for Immigration to the debate on Refugee Family Reunion on 21 June 2018.

Caroline Nokes: We are on track to resettle 20,000 refugees from Syria and a further 30,000 children and families from the wider middle east and north Africa—MENA—region. [Official Report, 21 June 2018, Vol. 643, c. 553.]

Letter of correction from Caroline Nokes:

An error has been identified in the response I made to the debate on Refugee Family Reunion.

The correct response should have been:

Caroline Nokes: We are on track to resettle 20,000 refugees from Syria and a further **3,000** children and families from the wider middle east and north Africa—MENA—region.

DEFENCE

Counter-Daesh Update

The following is an extract from questions on a statement by the Secretary of State for Defence on 3 July 2018.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Secretary of State accept that our principal allies on the ground in Syria have been Kurdish-led? Does he share my concern that, having helped to suppress and eliminate Daesh in Syria, those Kurdish-led forces may now find themselves under attack by Turkey, a country with an ambivalent record toward both Islamist extremism on the one hand and Russia on the other? What will we do if we find our Kurdish allies are attacked by our so-called NATO ally?

Gavin Williamson: We have worked incredibly closely with the Syrian defence forces over a period of time, as have other coalition allies. We are working closely with the United States and France to get a dialogue going between the Syrian defence forces and Turkey to ensure that there is no conflict of the form that my right hon. Friend raises. [Official Report, 3 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 196.]

Letter of correction from Gavin Williamson:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis).

The correct response should have been:

Gavin Williamson: We have worked incredibly closely with the Syrian **democratic** forces over a period of time, as have other coalition allies. We are working closely with the United States and France to get a dialogue going between the Syrian **democratic** forces and Turkey to ensure that there is no conflict of the form that my right hon. Friend raises.

The following is a further extract from questions on a statement by the Secretary of State for Defence on 3 July 2018.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): The Kurdish people fought with some of the most bravery and effect to defend their local populations against the cruelties of Daesh. What are the UK Government now doing to protect the Kurdish people of Iraq and Syria from being attacked by the Governments of those two countries and, indeed, by the Government of Turkey?

Gavin Williamson: We continue to work very closely with, especially, the Iraqi Government and the Turkish Government to make sure that we have sensible and pragmatic solutions. We have always had a very strong relationship with the Kurds, especially in Afghanistan. We have a very good relationship with the SDF, which is both Kurdish and Arab. We will continue to work to try to ensure, especially in Syria, that the SDF is an integral part of the solution for that country going forward. [Official Report, 3 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 201.]

Letter of correction from Gavin Williamson:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin).

The correct response should have been:

Gavin Williamson: We continue to work very closely with, especially, the Iraqi Government and the Turkish Government to make sure that we have sensible and pragmatic solutions. We have always had a very strong relationship with the Kurds, especially in **Iraq**. We have a very good relationship with the SDF, which is both Kurdish and Arab. We will continue to work to try to ensure, especially in Syria, that the SDF is an integral part of the solution for that country going forward.

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Thursday 12 July 2018**

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