

Thursday  
11 October 2018

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 11 October 2018**

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# House of Commons

*Thursday 11 October 2018*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

### MIDDLE LEVEL BILL

*Motion made*, That the Lords amendments be now considered.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Lords amendments to be considered on Tuesday 16 October at 4 pm.*

## Oral Answers to Questions

### TRANSPORT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

1. **Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve the availability of electric vehicle infrastructure. [906912]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** As Members will be aware, earlier this summer we published our Road to Zero strategy, setting out plans for our £400 million charging infrastructure investment fund. We now have more than 14,000 public charge points, and the fund will lead to the installation of thousands more. Importantly, we are also planning to consult on introducing a requirement for charge points in new homes in England, and we want all new lampposts to include charge points, where appropriate.

**Luke Graham:** In my constituency, we are getting to the end of the signing of the Tay cities deal, part of which includes a proposal for an innovation highway. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss that highway, which will form part of Perth West development?

**Chris Grayling:** I am happy to do that. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government is actively engaged in preparing the deal. I am pleased at the way my hon. Friend is championing the future of technology in transport in his constituency, and I would be delighted to meet him to discuss it.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State had any discussions with Jaguar Land Rover, which is concerned about Brexit at the moment, meaning that there could be a hold-up in investment in electric vehicles?

**Chris Grayling:** I have indeed discussed, on more than one occasion, both Brexit and new generation automotive technology with the chief executive of Jaguar Land Rover. I am very excited about what it is doing on electric vehicles, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that I know of no reason why it would pull back on that investment. Indeed, I am looking forward to the Government Car Service taking delivery of its first five electric vehicles from Jaguar Land Rover in the next few days.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that in areas where inadequate power is available in the grid for large commercial installations wishing to switch over to electric power, a battery solution, provided by companies such as Off Grid Energy Ltd in my constituency, may be the answer?

**Chris Grayling:** We are on the threshold of exciting developments in battery technology—I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. We are working with National Grid to look at ways in which we can increase the capacity to key locations such as motorway service areas, but I say to him that battery technology is going to deliver some solutions we do not have at present. It is great to see businesses in the UK at the forefront of developing those technologies.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State see any contradiction between the policy of trying to move motorists away from petrol and diesel vehicles to electric vehicles, and freezing fuel duty while cutting grants for electric vehicles?

**Chris Grayling:** We are focusing our support on electric vehicles, which are the part of the market we want to see grow the fastest. We provide substantial incentives to buyers of electric vehicles. It was great to see that, in August, 12% of the new car market was low-emission vehicles, which is a big step forward for this country.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Carbon emissions in Scotland have been halved since 1990, but the next part of the low-carbon transition is the electrification of Scotland's roads. The Scottish National party Government have committed to 1,500 new charge points. Does the Secretary of State agree that Scotland needs to get its fair share of the £400 million charge fund, based on our rural nature and unique geography?

**Chris Grayling:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, public spending in England is always matched by a Barnett-based element of public spending in Scotland, and that will continue to be the case.

**Alan Brown:** That answer is completely inadequate. We should not be getting such funding based on Barnett. Scotland has two thirds of the land mass of England but got only a fifth of the broadband funding. Will the Secretary of State make sure this iniquitous position does not happen in respect of the £400 million charging fund?

**Chris Grayling:** This is a bit of a groundhog day, because every time we hear SNP Members talking about the finances of Scotland, if Barnett works in their favour, they are happy to say that they insist on having

Barnett, but if they want more than that, they say Barnett is not good enough. They cannot have it both ways.

### Traffic Congestion: A120

2. **James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce congestion on the A120. [906913]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman)**: As my hon. Friend will know, the Department has provided up to £4 million of funding to Essex County Council to support the development of proposals for improvements to the A120 between Braintree and Colchester. The council consulted on options last year and announced its favoured route in June 2018. My Department is now considering whether or not to include the scheme in the next road investment strategy, which will be published next year.

**James Cleverly**: The Minister will be aware that the A120 around Braintree is a road so heavily and regularly congested that my constituents regularly cut through Braintree to bypass the bypass. We welcome the money for the preferred route option, but will the Minister ensure that he will also consider any interim measure to relieve congestion?

**Jesse Norman**: Aware, Mr Speaker? How could I not be aware? My hon. Friend has been indefatigable; in fact, few parliamentarians in any Parliament could have matched his energy and zeal in pressing the case for the A120. He has been terrier-like in his lobbying, and he can take it from me that the Minister has been duly terrierised.

**Mr Speaker**: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have that tribute framed and erected in a suitable location in his home. We look forward to an update on that in due course.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker**: I am not sure how this matter relates to Northamptonshire, but I have a feeling that the hon. Gentleman is about to explain.

**Mr Bone**: Mr Speaker, to get to the A120 in Braintree, which a lot of my constituents want to do, they have to go down the A509, which is even more congested. The Minister has kindly given £25 million for a bypass, but the wretched South East Midlands local enterprise partnership quango is blocking it. Will he get together with me to knock some heads together and get the bypass sorted out so that we can get to Braintree on the A120?

**Jesse Norman**: I am frightened and worried to think that that may be the only use for the new road; if that is in fact the case, perhaps we should reconsider the investment case. My hon. Friend can take it from me that the Department for Transport has been following the issue very closely. It is entirely a matter for SEMLEP and Northamptonshire County Council, but I am happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the matter further.

### Leaving the EU: Perishable Scottish Food

3. **Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the transportation of perishable Scottish food abroad after the UK leaves the EU. [906914]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling)**: My Department has regular discussions with Scottish Government officials and has discussed this issue with them. We are well aware of the importance of rapid transit for perishable goods. I should reiterate that we are of course committed to securing a deal that works for the entire United Kingdom—Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England. Having thought back to events earlier this summer, I should also say that the biggest conduit for perishable Scottish produce is of course Heathrow airport, from where Scottish smoked salmon is carried around the world. That makes it all the more sad that the Scottish National party chose to vote against the expansion of Heathrow, which will be good for Scotland.

**Jamie Stone**: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer, which was interesting and helpful. It is obvious that most Scottish perishable food products have to pass through England to reach the export markets. Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be best if all the laws in Scotland and in the rest of the UK that might affect the movement and export of such products were brought into harmonisation? Any misalignment of laws would be unhelpful to the export of Scottish food products. Will he press this matter with the Scottish Government whenever he can?

**Chris Grayling**: I am slightly puzzled, because the harmonisation of laws would imply backing away from devolution. The reality is that in a devolved settlement, as we have with Scotland, there will always be some differences. Nevertheless, we and the Scottish Government must always work together in the interests of the whole United Kingdom and of producers throughout the whole United Kingdom.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Air transport is obviously vital for Scottish food producers, as it is for businesses and people throughout the UK. In October 2016, the Secretary of State told the Transport Committee that future aviation arrangements would form part of the Brexit negotiations “in the next few months”

and would be handled by the Department for Exiting the European Union. A year later, with no evidence of progress, the Secretary of State assured the Committee that there was no danger of planes being grounded by a no-deal Brexit. A year on, it is clear from the Government's own technical notices that that is a real possibility. Who in the Government is handling this matter? What progress has been made? What confidence can people have when booking flights? How can we reach any conclusion other than that this matter has been badly mishandled?

**Chris Grayling**: I am sorry, but the hon. Lady has got this completely wrong. The Government have said or done nothing to imply that planes will be grounded and

there will be no flights after we leave the European Union. I give the House the categorical assurance that flights are going to continue. Interestingly, those in the aviation industry who have been most vociferous about the risk of planes being grounded are now selling tickets for next summer and expanding the number of routes from the United Kingdom to the European Union next summer.

**Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): Post austerity and post Brexit, what additional funding might be used by the Government to invest in Scottish ports so as to allow more exports into Europe, our main market for food and drink?

**Chris Grayling**: Well, of course, a number of the Scottish ports are trust ports. I have been to the port in Montrose. I am very keen to see ports like that expand and I am working with a local Member of Parliament—a fantastic new Conservative Member of Parliament—to ensure that we provide the support and the opportunities for such ports to grow and develop.

### Railway Infrastructure

4. **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Ind): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the cost of railway infrastructure; and if he will make a statement. [906915]

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson)**: Information on trends in infrastructure costs on the railways are published by the Office of Road and Rail in its UK rail industry financial report, which is found on its website. Spending by Network Rail was £7.3 billion in 2016-17, an increase of half a billion pounds, or 7% in real terms, on the previous year.

**Kelvin Hopkins**: Since rail privatisation, the costs of rail infrastructure works have gone through the roof, multiplying several times. The Minister may have seen a recently published analysis showing that electrification, for example, now costs seven times more in real terms—stripping out inflation—than when British Rail electrified the east coast main line. Is it not obvious that we should not only nationalise train operations, but rebuild publicly owned in-house works capacity and save billions for the public purse and for passengers?

**Joseph Johnson**: I remind the hon. Gentleman that Network Rail is responsible for most railway infrastructure work in this country and it is, of course, in the public sector. He rightly highlights the need for Government to ensure that they get the greatest possible efficiency and value for money from all our infrastructure investments. That is why we have set up a mechanism to benchmark costs across the industry in the most rigorous way possible so that we get full value for money from the record sums that we are investing in our railways—£48 billion over the next five-year period.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Despite being the centre of population of our country, my seat has no railway station. I have been campaigning for many years for the opening of the Ivanhoe line between Burton-on-Trent and Leicester to aid further economic growth and reduce road congestion. Does the Minister agree that it is better to spend money on these

local deliverable projects to improve people's lives than on national white elephant projects with huge runaway budgets?

**Joseph Johnson**: Of course, we need to invest in transformative schemes such as HS2 and Crossrail, which are going to change connectivity for the better, but we can do everything. We can invest also in the smaller schemes, which will deliver valuable change to local communities.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): The Minister will be aware of my ongoing campaign to close the Pencoed level crossing in my constituency. When he met me, he said that Network Rail had not prioritised the closure, but Network Rail tells me that the scheme costs so much that it would require additional funding from the UK Government. I am meeting representatives of Network Rail again tomorrow, so can he say now, ahead of my meeting, that Ministers in the DFT will give additional funding to close the level crossing?

**Joseph Johnson**: We take the issue of safety at level crossings exceptionally seriously. This is an area that the Department, alongside Network Rail, is looking at closely, and I look forward to receiving an update from Network Rail following the hon. Gentleman's meeting with its representatives tomorrow.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): The Great Western electrification project has become a case study in weak project planning and control, so will my hon. Friend work closely with the Railway Industry Association on its electrification cost challenge to help drive down the costs of these projects with a view to looking again particularly at the south Wales bit of that project, because electrification of all the main lines must remain a long-term ambition for our railways.

**Joseph Johnson**: I share my right hon. Friend's concerns in that respect. That is why the Department has asked the industry to come together in the transport infrastructure efficiency strategy, which was launched last year and which will benchmark costs, including in electrification, so that we get the greatest possible value for the money that we are investing in our railways.

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): We have seen Crossrail delayed at great cost, a failure in electrification and many question marks over HS2. When will the Minister's Department get a real grip on the cost and delivery of decent rail infrastructure in this country?

**Joseph Johnson**: We are investing £48 billion in these projects over the next five-year period. It is vital that we get value for money. Obviously, it is disappointing that Crossrail, which is a 100% subsidiary of Transport for London, told the Department that it needed to revise the delivery schedule for phase three of the project. We are disappointed by the news and want that phase completed as rapidly as possible.

### East Midlands Trains: Sheffield to London

5. **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What discussions he has had with East Midlands Trains on improving the timetable for the Sheffield to London service. [906916]

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson):** We are investing in the biggest upgrade of the midland main line since it was completed in 1870. The upgrade will reduce journey times between Nottingham and Sheffield and London by up to 20 minutes in the peak once it is complete.

**Paul Blomfield:** I thank the Minister for that response, but it misses the immediate point. The May timetable changes mean that we have no direct rail services from London to Sheffield between the peak afternoon hours of 16.47 and 18.02, where previously there were three. These services have been sacrificed to improve Govia Thameslink services for London and the south-east. Does the Minister think that that is acceptable? If not, what is he going to do about it?

**Joseph Johnson:** We recognise the challenges of integrating the £7 billion Thameslink programme with the ambitious upgrade of the midland main line costing over £1 billion. That did require hard choices regarding the rationalisation of services, but the situation will be resolved from 2020 onwards with the completion of the upgrade of the midland main line, which will add capacity to the route.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** All the trains from London to Sheffield have to go through Kettering, but sadly not enough of them stop at Kettering. We used to have a half-hourly service northbound from Kettering, but the last Labour Government cut that to one an hour. Will the rail Minister reinstate the half-hourly service?

**Joseph Johnson:** In the consultation on the next east midlands franchise, we have proposed that the extra capacity to be delivered on the midland main line is used to provide 50% more seats in the peak on the fast direct service between Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Bedford, Luton, Luton Airport Parkway and London St Pancras. This will mean longer, quieter, more comfortable and more efficient trains.

**Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab):** It costs over £150 a month to commute to Leeds and Sheffield from Barnsley, yet the trains—which belong in museums—are often delayed and packed to a dangerous capacity. When will the Government get a grip and invest in northern transport?

**Joseph Johnson:** We are investing in new rolling stock, not just across the north of England with all trains there being either replaced or fully refurbished, but also on the midland main line, where new trains will be coming in from 2022 onwards. These will be efficient, environmentally friendly, bi-mode trains of the most innovative kind anywhere in Europe.

### Rail User Numbers

6. **Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op):** What steps he is taking in response to the reduction in the number of rail users. [906917]

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson):** After a decade of sustained growth in passenger numbers across Great Britain between 2004 and 2014,

averaging at about 5% growth every year, journey growth slowed to under 1% in 2016-17 and fell by around 1% in 2017-18. However, there was growth of about 3% in passenger numbers in the first quarter of 2018-19.

**Alex Norris:** Since 2010, fares have risen at double the rate of wages. What assurances can Ministers give me that there will not be a reduction in rail usage from poorer communities such as mine as people are increasingly priced out?

**Joseph Johnson:** Passenger numbers have more than doubled in the period of privatised operation of fares. This has happened in an environment in which the Government have frozen fares in real terms for the past six years, and we will be doing so again for the coming financial year. Fares rose by 20% in real terms under the Labour Government. By contrast, they have risen by 2% in the period since 2010.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con):** In last year's budget, the Chancellor announced a new railcard for those aged 26 to 30, giving 4.5 million more young people a third off their rail fares. Would that increase the number of people using the trains, and what has happened to that scheme?

**Joseph Johnson:** It is quite possible that it would lead to such an increase. This is an exciting, industry-led trial of the 26-to-30 railcard that the Chancellor announced in his Budget last year. We are waiting the full assessment of that trial, and further steps will be announced in due course.

**Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab):** Every week I am contacted by constituents who are giving up travelling to work by train because of the appalling service that they have received from Northern rail. When are Ministers going to get a grip of—or preferably scrap—this failing franchise?

**Joseph Johnson:** At the request of Transport for the North in one of its recent board meetings, we have jointly appointed Richard George, who previously played an important role in the delivery of the London Olympic games, to co-ordinate better the performance of the train operators in the north of England—Northern and TransPennine Express—alongside Network Rail. We are looking forward to seeing the results of his work. I met him yesterday, and he has a hard-driving agenda.

**Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con):** I have just heard the answer that my hon. Friend has given, but this morning, as most mornings at my constituency station of Woodlesford, 40 people could not get on the 7.41 train. Numbers are reducing because quite frankly people cannot get in the damn carriage. What pressure is my hon. Friend putting on Northern and Network Rail to get the new rolling stock over to my constituents' service so that they can get on the train?

**Joseph Johnson:** I can tell my hon. Friend that new rolling stock is starting to be delivered right now. Improving performance on Northern is a priority. It has been improving significantly since the difficulties over the

summer, but there is always room for further progress. The Department will hold it and its owner Arriva to account for their performance in the coming months.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): In discussions with the devolved legislatures, will the Minister ensure that the promotion of rail travel, especially for the elderly, in rural areas right across the United Kingdom is put at the forefront of the minds of Translink in Northern Ireland and the other providers across Great Britain?

**Joseph Johnson:** That is an important consideration, and the Department gives it great attention. We want to ensure that rail is accessible to all communities. The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point.

### Careers at Sea

7. **Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to promote a career at sea to young people. [906918]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** The Department supports a number of initiatives promoting careers at sea and on land in the maritime sector, including Seafarers Awareness Week, Maritime UK's maritime careers forum, the Women In Maritime Taskforce and the Year Of Engineering. To increase cadetships, the SMarT budget is being doubled to £30 million, and the Government continue to support the sector in developing maritime apprenticeships.

**Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): Southampton is one of the busiest ports in the country, and the UK's No. 1 export port. There are many opportunities in the marine and maritime sector in addition to a life at sea, and if our ports are to continue to thrive beyond Brexit, we will have to attract the brightest and best of the industry. What plans does my hon. Friend have to promote opportunities in the wider marine and maritime sector?

**Ms Ghani:** My hon. Friend, like me, is a champion of Southampton port and of increasing the seafaring population. Ports such as Southampton have a key job to do in accessing our global markets. We support a range of initiatives promoting careers at sea and on land in the maritime sector. We have developed maritime apprenticeships and doubled the SMarT budget to £30 million to increase cadetships, and we support a wide range of campaigns such as seafarers awareness week and a campaign that I launched myself—Women in the Maritime Task Force—to increase the current pitiful 3% of maritime jobs held by women.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): One thing that would bring young people into the industry is decent wages. The Scottish Government recently commissioned a survey of the extra freight service from Aberdeen to Lerwick. I am told by RMT officials that the operators may be paying as little as £3.78 per hour. That is something that the Scottish Government should not be allowing, but it would not be an option if the Minister implemented the legal working group recommendations that she received earlier this year without any further delay.

**Ms Ghani:** I recently met the RMT to discuss a number of issues, including the national minimum wage, which I am keen to explore, working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The right hon. Gentleman is right. We need to ensure that people are paid and dealt with appropriately and work in comfortable circumstances, whether at sea or on shore.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): It is scandalous that British officers and ratings hold fewer than 20% of jobs on UK vessels, while the shipping companies reap the benefits from the tonnage tax. Does the Minister agree that we need to create a mandatory link to training and employment of British seafarers, including ratings, as other EU countries have?

**Ms Ghani:** The tonnage tax enables us to have six types of apprenticeship, and it encourages companies to employ UK ratings as well. We are doing everything we can, whether it is on ports or working with our ship owners, to ensure that every opportunity is available for young people to enter the maritime sector as a career.<sup>1</sup>

**Karl Turner:** There is no link for ratings. It is not true.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman, I can see, is in what I would call good chuntering form. His favourite sport is to chunter from a sedentary position. [Interruption.] I am grateful to be advised of the hon. Gentleman's opinions from his seat as well as when he is on his feet.

### Electric Vehicles

8. **Mr John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the transition to electric vehicles. [906920]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** It is always a pleasure to answer a question from such a distinguished former Transport Minister. I know that my right hon. Friend will be excited by the progress we are making with the Road to Zero strategy. Our ambition is for all new cars and vans to be effectively zero-emission by 2040, supported by a package of demand, supply and infrastructure measures and £1.5 billion of funding. He will also be interested to know that we hosted in Birmingham recently the world's first international zero-emission vehicle summit, which was attended by countries from all around the world.

**Mr Hayes:** Mr Speaker, you know, and the Secretary of State does too, that in my time as Minister of State I sought to electrify the Department, this House and our country. To make the future electric, we need charging infrastructure sufficient to build confidence in those who, unlike the liberal bourgeoisie, do not have space to charge vehicles at home. Will the Secretary of State set out plans for how we will have widespread on-street charging infrastructure that is accessible, recognisable by its beauty and has a common payment method? I say that not to guarantee my own political legacy, but in the national interest and for the common good.

**Chris Grayling:** None the less, Mr Speaker, you will recall that in the debates in Committee on the Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill, such infrastructure became affectionately known as "Hayes hook-ups", and we

1. [Official Report, 15 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 6MC.]

expect to see them spreading round the country shortly. Quite apart from the work we are doing with local authorities to ensure, for example, that lamp post installations contain the facility for on-street charging, what is particularly exciting is the progress being made towards high-speed, high-voltage charging, which I think within a relatively short number of years will lead to the ability to charge a vehicle in under 10 minutes. That is when we will see the breakthroughs that spread electric vehicles all across our society.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Can I offer the Secretary of State a really good opportunity for a win on electric vehicles? The biggest fleets in our country are the waste trucks that pick up waste from every house in every street in every part of our country every week, and they are polluting vehicles. This is a great opportunity. Dennis Eagle, a British manufacturer, is now producing a battery-operated waste truck. If we could get electric trucks to pick up the waste in this country, we would have a fantastic decline in pollution in our cities.

**Chris Grayling:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. The roads Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), is already working with manufacturers on transforming the local delivery fleet network, but we will certainly take on board the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. I was not aware that that vehicle had been produced. If we are going to meet air quality challenges, we need to make the kind of change he describes.

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): One of the great prizes of the electric vehicle revolution will be autonomous vehicles, but for them to bring all the great advantages they can bring to all of us, and particularly disabled people, we need to have public trust in that technology. What is the Department doing to establish that public trust?

**Chris Grayling:** A number of trials are taking place around the country, which are paving the way for this revolution. I pay particular tribute to Andy Street, the Mayor of Birmingham, who is working with the industry in the west midlands—the heart of our automotive industry—on on-street trials on all kinds of roads there. This revolution is going to transform lives. It is going to create real opportunities for people with disabilities and the elderly. We are a way away from an automated vehicle being able to go up and down a single-track road with passing spaces, but the reality is that in and around our major towns and cities, this revolution is going to start happening very soon.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Electric vehicles need to be dependable. Can the Secretary of State outline what consumer protection and consumer care will be in place for those with electric vehicles who have an issue with charging that leaves them stranded? I am aware of that happening.

**Chris Grayling:** It sounds as though the hon. Gentleman and I had better have a conversation about that, so that we can look at specific cases. It is clearly important that

consumers with electric vehicles have the benefits of the same consumer protections as any other kind of vehicle driver.

### Civil Aviation Noise

9. **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): What progress his Department has made on reducing the level of civil aviation noise. [906921]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** We have set a policy framework which expects industry to manage and provide mitigation for aviation noise. Within this, the overall level of civil aviation noise in the UK continues to decrease. Last October, I introduced a suite of new policies which enhance the way the impact of noise on communities is assessed in airspace changes. At the same time, I announced the establishment of an Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise. Through the development of our new aviation strategy, we are now looking also at the regulatory framework, to make sure we have the right protection in place for local communities.

**Andrew Rosindell:** The Secretary of State will be aware that complaints about London City airport have gone up dramatically since the introduction of the new concentrated flightpaths. Although quieter aeroplane engines are welcome, will he do all he can to ensure that there is a fairer spread of flightpaths along the east Thames corridor, particularly affecting my constituents in Romford, Hornchurch and the whole London Borough of Havering?

**Chris Grayling:** This is a very important issue, and one that my Department and the Civil Aviation Authority are reviewing carefully. Notwithstanding the work needed in the shorter term to address noise from City airport, I believe that the outcome of our airspace modernisation programme, using new technology to manage airspace, will enable us to manage the impacts on communities much better and make a real difference.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Yesterday, the World Health Organisation issued new, tighter guidelines on noise. Given that about 1.5 million people in London and the south-east already live within the 45 dB Lden noise contour, where the WHO now says there are adverse health impacts, will the Government reassess their approach to Heathrow expansion?

**Chris Grayling:** It is important to recognise that the change in technology—the arrival of a new generation of lower noise, lower emission and lower fuel-consuming aircraft—will transform the environment around Heathrow and all our airports. One just has to listen to a Boeing 747 landing at Heathrow compared with, for example, one of the new Airbus or Boeing aeroplanes to realise the huge difference. As the older aeroplanes are phased out, I expect noise at all airports will be reduced, and that is a good thing.

### Access for All Programme

10. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What progress has been made on implementing the Access for All programme. [906923]



**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Access for All has delivered step-free, accessible routes at more than 200 stations since it was launched in 2006, and smaller access improvements at over 1,500 stations. To build on that success, we have extended the fund and made a further £300 million available via the inclusive transport strategy.

**Bob Blackman:** I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. For disabled people, particularly wheelchair users, having decent access to public transport is the difference between being able to work and get out and being confined to their home. Does she agree that the Mayor of London should match this exciting scheme, so that we can get Transport for London to implement proper access to Stanmore, Canons Park, Queensbury and Harrow & Wealdstone stations in my constituency?

**Ms Ghani:** My hon. Friend is right: if the Mayor of London spent as much time fixing the tube station as he did promoting himself at the station, it would be far more accessible. As my hon. Friend is aware, transport in London is devolved to the Mayor and delivered by Transport for London, so it is for the Mayor to determine his accessibility policy and the provision of step-free access at individual stations.

**Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab):** There is no step-free access at Bedford station while much needed repairs are made to the lifts, but passengers were not informed until days before of the severe disruption to their journeys. Govia Thameslink Railway is already facing potential fines for not keeping passengers informed. Does the Minister agree that no lessons have been learned from the chaos over the summer?

**Ms Ghani:** Bedford station is, I believe, fitted for step-free access. It is unfortunate that the lifts are broken and that they have not been repaired quickly. Hopefully, the hon. Gentleman raising the matter today will alert GTR and Network Rail to the need to get their act into gear. I know that taxis are available for passengers who need the service, but the lifts should be fixed.

**Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab):** Government cuts have forced local authority bus budgets in England and Wales to be cut by more than £20 million last year. Services such as the No. 3 bus in Wincobank in my constituency have been reduced, affecting the elderly and those with mobility issues. What are the Government doing to ensure the provision of sustainable and accessible public transport in areas such as my constituency, particularly in view of the Prime Minister's announcement that austerity is now over?

**Ms Ghani:** Budgets to support our buses are helping bus services up and down the country, and patronages are changing depending on where people are in the country. The hon. Lady is right to say that disabled people tend to take buses more than other forms of transport, but if local authorities work closely with bus operating companies they can increase access and patronage. In areas such as Liverpool, Bristol and South Gloucestershire, patronages have gone up. Bus companies can do a lot to ensure more accessibility, from using technology to ensuring that the buses themselves are more accessible.

## Road Transport Emissions

11. **Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to reduce harmful emissions from road transport. [906924]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Government's mission is for all new cars and vans to be effectively zero emission by 2040. The Road to Zero strategy, which we published in July, sets out a wide range of actions that have been taken to achieve that goal, as well as steps to drive down emissions from conventional vehicles in the meantime. Those measures involve about £1.5 billion of investment.

**Graham P. Jones:** The recent National Infrastructure Commission report identified Accrington as the most congested town in the country. Has the Minister read that report, and does he recognise that fact? Will he meet my local authority to try to find a resolution, and what outcome to that problem would he like to see?

**Jesse Norman:** Yes I have—not only have I read the report, but I have talked to Sir John Armitt, head of the National Infrastructure Commission, about the implications of the work it is doing. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman. This is the first I have heard about the issue from him, but if he wants to come and bring with him representatives from his local authority, he is welcome to have that conversation.

**Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab):** This month's United Nations climate change report offers a chilling glimpse of the apocalypse of drought, flooding and human displacement that we face should global warming not be restricted to 1.5 °C. Given the contribution made by road transport to the UK's greenhouse emissions, was the Prime Minister's boast yesterday that fuel duty has been frozen for seven years, at a cost of £46 billion, ill-judged? Has the Secretary of State failed to provide the leadership necessary for the road transport sector to play its full part in reducing emissions?

**Jesse Norman:** I will leave the Secretary of State to answer for himself in future questions and conversations, but there cannot be much doubt that the goal is to balance the effective use of all modes of transport with the important need to make a transition to low emissions as fast as possible. We are doing so at a great pace, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the many decisions that have been taken about improving air quality across the country, of the zero emission vehicle summit that we held in September, and of the Birmingham declaration that was world-leading in bringing other countries to the table.

**Andy McDonald:** The reality is that the policies of this Government have directly increased harmful emissions from road transport. Bus funding has been slashed, plug-in car grants cut, and there is chaos in the transition to electric motor vehicles and trains. Will the Secretary of State wake up and accept that he cannot continue to crawl along in the slow lane when it comes to tackling climate change?

**Jesse Norman:** I apologise for being the same person that I was when I answered the previous question and not the Secretary of State, but let me pick up on the hon. Gentleman's points. In August, 12% of new vehicles were electric, and that is because electric vehicles are beginning a fast S-curve of take-up. They have been heavily supported by this Government, and they will continue to be so supported.<sup>1</sup>

### Sexual Assaults: Railways

12. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What recent steps he has taken to reduce the number of sexual assaults and public order offences on the railways. [906926]

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson):** The Department and the British Transport police are committed to tackling crime and antisocial behaviour. The BTP takes sexual offences exceptionally seriously and has been encouraging people who experience harassment or assault of a sexual nature to report their experiences under the Project Guardian programme and the "Report it to stop it" campaign.

**Justin Madders:** My constituent's son was travelling down from school on the Wrexham to Bidston line, and was waiting at Upton station when he was attacked by a group of youths. The station is unmanned, and my constituent was horrified to find out that there is no CCTV. What can be done to ensure better security at unmanned stations?

**Joseph Johnson:** The son of the hon. Gentleman's constituent clearly had a terrible experience, and our sympathies go out to him. The Department is working closely with train operating companies on the Secure Stations Scheme, to give more stations across the network accredited status. CCTV will have an important role to play in stations, just as it does in the new rolling stock that we are introducing across the country. I remind Opposition Members that we want more staff working on our railways, not fewer, and for operators where there have been disputes relating to staffing levels, such as Southern and South Western Railway, that is indeed the case.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Every day, women make choices on the basis of their safety, continually planning, checking and trying to read situations. Since 2012, sexual crime has seen a staggering 167% increase on our railways, to a record 2,472 cases last year. Women are 13 times more affected than men and the highest increases are in areas where trains operate without guards. What strategy are the Government deploying to ensure that all women feel, and are, safe?

**Joseph Johnson:** All passengers and all women must feel safe when travelling on our trains. The Department takes this issue exceptionally seriously, as do all train operators and the British Transport police. In concrete terms, Project Guardian is ensuring that the reporting of sexual offences becomes easier than ever before. We have introduced a new discreet safe texting service, 61016, which has encouraged much greater reporting of sexual harassment on trains or assaults of a sexual nature—[*Interruption.*] Guards and conductors have

not been removed from trains, as Opposition Members are suggesting. It is very frustrating that that line is being propagated in this misleading way. Driver-controlled operation means tasks such as closing doors can now be performed safely by the train driver, freeing up more time for guards to look after passengers, including women.

**Rachael Maskell:** Public order offences also rose by 116% over the same time period. A staggering 11,711 violent crime offences were committed just last year, with a total of 61,159 criminal offences in 2017-18, again hitting record highs. As we know, the presence of people in authority reduces the prevalence of crime, so can the Minister tell the House why he supports removing guards from trains—the very people who are passenger safety champions?

**Joseph Johnson:** We want the railways to be safe. In terms of crimes per million passenger journeys, they are safer than they were a decade ago. There are 19 crimes per million passenger journeys today, and a decade ago there were 30 crimes per million passenger journeys, but that is still too many and we want crime levels to come down. That is why the British Transport police are focusing on this very carefully. We have better reporting schemes, such as 61016, which I mentioned. As I said, we want more staff working on our railways, not fewer. That is the case for operators such as Southern and SWR, where there have recently been disputes.

### Cycling and Walking

13. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What recent steps his Department has taken to promote cycling and walking. [906927]

**Mr Speaker:** I call Minister of State Norman.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** Tragically not, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** It is only a matter of time.

**Jesse Norman:** A man can only dream.

My hon. Friend will, I hope, be delighted by the enormous energy that the Government have been showing in the area of cycling and walking, following our investment strategy published last year. That includes: the new safety review; new funding; cycle ambition cities; the transforming cities fund, which is being heavily used to improve urban environments for cycling and walking; support for changes to the "Highway Code" on close passing; and a great number of other measures. When we announce the response to the cycle safety review later this year, I hope there will be more to say on this topic.

**Andrew Selous:** If we are going to get half of all children cycling to school, as happens in the Netherlands—that can be compared with the paltry 3% here in the UK—so that we can cut pollution, congestion and obesity, can we ensure that all new roads and housing estates have safe cycle infrastructure designed into them, as it is more expensive to retrofit later?

1. [Official Report, 15 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 5MC.]

**Jesse Norman:** I certainly share that ambition. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government are seeking to have a child of 12, as well as people of all sexes, races and backgrounds, able to cycle without fear or impediment. Not all housing estates will be suitable for this kind of change—[HON. MEMBERS: “Why not?”] Some may be too far removed from urban city centres, but where they are suitable, I would support that ambition in the way that the Government have done by looking at electrification for new housing.

**Matt Rodda** (Reading East) (Lab): The Transport Department’s own statistics show that the Government are set to miss their target to increase the number of people who regularly walk and cycle. Walking is barely increasing, and many people are scared to cycle, as has been suggested, with nearly 60% telling the British social attitudes survey that they felt cycling was too dangerous, apparently because of the volume of traffic on the roads.

The Minister himself has said that the UK has a long way to go to improve levels of cycling and walking. Is it not high time for the Government to show some leadership and invest properly in walking and cycling, rather than paying lip service to pedestrians and cyclists?

**Jesse Norman:** Well, I think I said that we had a long way to go to match the standards set in some European cities that have been pioneers in this area. I do not think there is any doubt that the Government are doing more than any previous Government have done, and certainly more than the last Government by a factor of some three times in terms of funding per person—[*Interruption.*] The national chuntering club is out on the other side of the House. We have also taken a host of other measures to try to support cycling and improve safety, with precisely the laudable aims that the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

### Rail Network Accessibility

14. **Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the accessibility of the rail network. [906928]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** Three quarters of all passenger journeys are now made through stations with step-free access, compared with only half in 2006, and 87% of current rolling stock now meets accessibility standards compared with 75% last year. The inclusive transport strategy is the next step in our ambition to deliver accessible transport, and it includes up to £300 million to fund the Access for All programme for stations until at least 2024. All rolling stock will meet accessibility standards by 2020.

**Marsha De Cordova:** For thousands of disabled people, an accessible rail network can make the difference to going to work and seeing family and friends. We know that last year more than a third of disabled people experienced problems when travelling. In my constituency, three stations—Battersea Park, Queenstown Road and Wandsworth Town—are inaccessible. Rather than rail companies having to compete for funding to make stations more accessible, why cannot the Minister

agree to ensure that the Access for All programme is adequately funded so that every single station can be made accessible?

**Ms Ghani:** Access for All is a £300 million fund. At present, 75% of all journeys take place via step-free stations. I understand that the Battersea station was put forward for step-free access in the previous round. The new £300 million fund that is now being made available will take on board deferred projects next April, so the hon. Lady will be pleased to note that step-free access will be allocated and, through working with Network Rail, should be delivered for her station.

### Topical Questions

T1. [906937] **Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** It might be helpful if I inform the House that High Speed 2 is today publishing its environmental statement for phase 2b, which is the northern leg from Crewe to Manchester and through the east midlands to Leeds. It will be available in the Library. The route will clearly have an impact on many people, and I have instructed HS2 to treat people with as much decency as possible at what is a difficult time for them. If there are examples of where that is not happening, I want to hear about it, as does the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani). I would encourage Members to come and see us about that.

**Luciana Berger:** The northern powerhouse Minister was in my constituency last week to see the new Northern trains. During his visit, he said that passengers would be delighted that they have air-conditioned trains with wi-fi and charging points. New trains are welcome, but what my constituents need more than anything is reliable services that run on time. A recent *Liverpool Echo* poll showed that 52% of readers said that they would have to find another way to travel if services remain as unreliable as they have been since the timetable changes. There is still a very serious problem, so what steps will the Secretary of State take to resolve the rail disruption caused by the introduction of revised timetables since May?

**Chris Grayling:** As the hon. Lady will be aware, Northern rail’s performance has improved markedly since the difficult days in June and July. It is now running more services than it did prior to the timetable change. As for what we will do, we will replace every train with a newer and more reliable train, and we will get rid of all the old Pacer trains that run into and out of Liverpool which, frankly, should have gone to the scrapyard years ago. I hope that she will welcome the investment we have put into Liverpool Lime Street station. I am going there next week to see the long overdue work that has been done to upgrade that station.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mark Garnier. Not here.

T5. [906942] **Lee Rowley** (North East Derbyshire) (Con): Chesterfield canal is part of the way through a restoration of its historical route, which is to be completed in time for its 250th anniversary a few years from now. However,

the restoration of the last few miles has been stopped in recent years because confirmation cannot be obtained from HS2 that barges will still be able to get underneath it if the trains go ahead. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that that will be possible?

**Chris Grayling:** I should like to give my hon. Friend that assurance. It is a tragedy, in an era when canals are being reopened for leisure purposes, that when the M6 was built, so many parts of the Kendal canal were cut off and are no longer available. I do not wish, and I do not expect, to see HS2 do the same and culvert canals when the railway is being built.

T3. [906939] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Will the forthcoming aviation strategy Green Paper contain clear proposals for how the new slots to Scottish airports from Heathrow will be protected, and a guarantee on their numbers?

**Chris Grayling:** That will not happen as part of the aviation strategy document itself, but it will be done through separate mechanisms. I have made it very clear that—probably using the public service obligation procedure—we will introduce requirements alongside the development consent order, when it comes, to ensure that those slots are guaranteed for regional airports in the United Kingdom. That is an essential component of the expansion of Heathrow, and my Department will ensure that the protection of those slots for the regions of the UK is absolutely watertight.

T6. [906943] **Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): Since July, the Arriva Trains Wales service from Telford to Birmingham has been running with only two carriages, causing delays and overcrowding. Telford is a rapidly growing new town, but with only one direct train service per hour, we are being left behind. Will the Minister meet me, and the Telford train forum, to discuss how we can work together to ensure that Telford has the train service that it needs in order to grow and thrive?

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson):** Of course I should be delighted to meet my hon. Friend. Let me just add that the new West Midlands franchise serving Telford will in future introduce greater capacity on lines serving her constituency.

T4. [906940] **Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): What role do Ministers see for sub-national transport bodies such as Midlands Connect in the prioritising of investment in our major road network?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** We work closely with the sub-national transport bodies, which can be rather helpful in assessing local demand and local needs across a region.

T7. [906944] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): I have been contacted by a number of constituents about the use by heavy goods vehicles of unsuitable rural roads as rat runs. I understand that technology now exists to track those HGVs and create geo-fences to deter them from using unsuitable roads. Will the Minister consider making that technology compulsory to improve the lives of rural communities?

**Jesse Norman:** We absolutely recognise the problem. At present, the unsuitable use of roads is controlled through information and traffic control mechanisms, by Highways England and local authorities. We are tracking the geo-fencing technology closely. It requires a lot of other moving parts, but we are certainly thinking about it.

T8. [906945] **Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Tomorrow, Southeastern will introduce a temporary autumn recovery timetable, which will cause reductions in services and station-skipping throughout my constituency. Will the Minister commit himself to monitoring the situation to ensure that a normal timetable is introduced as soon as possible?

**Joseph Johnson:** We will of course be monitoring the autumn timetables across the country. I am glad to see that Southeastern's performance has been good in recent months: I believe that the current public performance measure is 94%.

**Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): Will the Minister update me on the work that he is doing with Devon County Council to ensure that there is a prompt start to the improvement works on the north Devon link road?

**Jesse Norman:** As my hon. Friend will know, the council is carrying out preparatory work on the road. We have been delighted to offer more than £80 million of funding under our large local majors scheme. We would like the work to begin in 2020, but we rely very much on the extra commitment that the council is making to ensure that the different aspects work.

T9. [906946] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): There have been a number of incidents involving Uber and black-cab drivers in the west midlands, and in one instance police were called to Coventry station to sort the problem out. When will the Minister legislate, as recommended by the Task and Finish Group on Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** The Task and Finish Group was established as a result of the ingenious foresight of a previous Transport Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes). Its report was made public only in the summer, but I am evaluating all its recommendations and will make a statement shortly.

**Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): HS2 will bring significant extra capacity and resilience to our railways. What more will it do to help and support places such as Nuneaton on the existing west coast main line?

**Chris Grayling:** There is a lot of discussion about HS2 and I simply wish to state again today the Government's commitment to the project; it is, I think, supported across the House and I welcome that support. The point about HS2 is that we have a rail system that is bursting at the seams and we have to create extra capacity on it. By creating the extra capacity on HS2 and taking the express trains off the conventional lines

and putting them on to HS2, we will free space for more commuter services into the cities affected and to places such as Nuneaton.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): The rail service offered by TransPennine Express to my constituents is frankly abysmal. If trains turn up at all, they are usually late, overcrowded and far too short. No more warm words, Secretary of State: what are you doing about it here and now?

**Mr Speaker:** I am not doing anything about it at all, but I hope that the Secretary of State might be.

**Chris Grayling:** What we are doing is making up for the fact that the last Labour Government in power established a zero-investment set of franchises in the north, with no new trains and no new investment. We are replacing, with either a brand new train or a refurbished-as-new train, every single train on the Northern and TransPennine franchises, with more seats, more carriages and a better deal for commuters. It has taken longer than I would have wished, but it is going to make a difference.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I acknowledge the Secretary of State's work to reduce congestion in the south-west, but may I urge him to look specifically at increasing capacity and reducing congestion on the A31 in Dorset?

**Jesse Norman:** As my hon. Friend will be aware, we have invested heavily in the A303. We have been looking closely at the A358 corridor and upgrading the A30, so I will absolutely discuss further with him the particular road he has in mind.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): The M56 is even more congested now than when I last raised the problem just a few months ago. When can we expect confirmation that it will be included for upgrade in the next road investment strategy?

**Jesse Norman:** As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we are already investing quite heavily in junctions 6 to 8 on the M56. Decisions about the second stage of the road investment strategy will be announced next year.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On behalf of the huge number of passengers who were delayed getting into London today, may I invite the rail Minister to give an enormous, if perhaps metaphorical, kick up the backside to the train operators, which should tell us not to get off trains when the tube station there is closed, to Network Rail, which should tell us the same thing as we walk through the station, and to Transport for London for perhaps not letting those organisations know in the first place? It is not good enough when disabled people have to walk to one part of a station only to find it is closed, and then to get back on their train and have to be told by other passengers not to do so. We pay for the service; we should not have to run it.

**Joseph Johnson:** There is clearly an important lesson to be learned regarding communication between the operating companies and passengers, and I will ensure that the Department gives it careful attention.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Now that the Secretary of State has admitted that HS2, with its £56 billion bill—and still rising—has got enough money to avoid the Chesterfield canal, will he take a decision to avoid the 30 houses due to be knocked down by HS2 in the village of Newton? Say it now, and let's get the matter sorted out.

**Ms Ghani:** It will surprise you, Mr Speaker, to know that I had a very productive meeting with the hon. Gentleman, and his councillors and activists, to understand the pressures he is under as he represents his constituency. There is no denying that HS2 is a large infrastructure project, and we will do everything we can to mitigate the impacts on communities and the environment.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): As a regular user of the A44 cycle path, I have seen many of the benefits that cycling can bring. As we look for improvements to the A40 and the Cotswold line to address congestion, does the Minister agree that cycling plays an essential part in an integrated transport network for West Oxfordshire?

**Jesse Norman:** Yes, we feel very strongly that for both the strategic network and local roads there is more scope for integration, and much of the investment we are making through both Highways England designated funds and local road investment is designed to support that integration.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. What is now required is a single-sentence question without semi-colons.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Minister followed the developments since our last meeting on the issue of ports infrastructure on the west coast of Scotland, and is she able to update us on any progress?

**Ms Ghani:** We are working on our Maritime 2050 strategy, which will look at ports, infrastructure, the environment, accessibility and employment opportunities. I would be more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to update him since our last meeting.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Does the Speaker agree that it has come to a pretty pass when a Member finds out that works have begun on a motorway to turn it into a parking lot without consultation either with the local community or with surrounding Members? The M26 works started last night. I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in April to ask whether this was going to happen, and I was assured that works were not planned. Only yesterday was it confirmed to me that Highways England had said that that was exactly what was planned, despite having told me the reverse only a week earlier. Does the Speaker agree with me, and will he urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to explain to the House how this planning permission has been granted with no consultation?

**Mr Speaker:** I admire the breathing capacity of the hon. Gentleman. I get the impression that he is at least moderately discontented.

**Tom Tugendhat:** Correct, Sir.

**Mr Speaker:** I am not sure that my view is of any great interest to the House, but I am sure that it will want to know what the Secretary of State has to say to my somewhat irritated colleague.

**Chris Grayling:** I am happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this. I do not expect any of the contingencies that we have in place for a no-deal Brexit to be needed, because I am confident that we will reach a sensible agreement, but I would be happy to discuss this with him.

**Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab):** Peak-time trains were cancelled yesterday and today, and there are regular delays at peak time. Is the railways Minister satisfied with the performance of the network and of the Southeastern train operator?

**Joseph Johnson:** Of course there is always room for improvement, and the next franchise has set demanding specifications for the south-eastern section of the network. I would say to the hon. Gentleman that the performance of Southeastern has been strong in recent months. Today, the public performance measure that tests arrivals within five minutes of the scheduled arrival time for Eltham to London Bridge has been excellent, at above 90%.

**Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con):** I am sorry that I was late this morning, Mr Speaker—the train was delayed again. When are we going to get 15-minute Delay Repay compensation for passengers on the Great Eastern main line?

**Joseph Johnson:** Under this Government, we have been rolling out Delay Repay 15 in a number of franchises. We are seeking to do that as and when franchises come up for letting so that more passengers get compensation when their trains are delayed by more than 15 minutes.

**Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab):** Last week, the chief executive of Go-Ahead, one of our major private bus operators, called for a national bus strategy. We have strategies for everything else, so why not for buses?

**Ms Ghani:** I know that the hon. Gentleman is a passionate advocate for buses, and we have met to discuss this issue many times. I am keen to ensure that we are putting the right resources into this and that the people making decisions on bus services are given the right support. This is something that I am exploring and keen to do.

**Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con):** Will the Minister undertake to give Highways England a nudge to carry out the environmental study required for the A45 dualling works between Stanwick and Thrapston so that they can go ahead in the next road period?

**Jesse Norman:** I do not need to, because my hon. Friend has done a splendid job in the House himself.

**Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab):** Given that the introduction of E10 fuel would improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions, why do we not introduce it? When are the Government going to do this?

**Jesse Norman:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that this is the subject of a consultation that has only just closed. We will need to review that, but we are looking closely at the issue and we have been making tremendous progress on it. He will also be aware that some of the business concerns that have been expressed had much more to do with the low bioethanol price and higher wheat prices than with the Government's position.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but we must now move on to other business.

## Student Loan Book: Sale

**Mr Speaker:** Just before I call the shadow Secretary of State to ask the urgent question, I should like to point out to the House that this is not the occasion for a general debate on the merits or demerits of student loan arrangements. This will be narrowly focused—with laser-like precision, I am sure—on the sale of the student loan book, and inquiries that pertain thereto will be orderly. We must not have what I would call a Second Reading-style debate. In any case, I do not intend to run this for longer than half an hour, and possibly for a shorter period than that.

10.39 am

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the sale of the student loan book?

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Mr Sam Gyimah):** I want to explain to the House the rationale for the sale of the student loan book and make some important points. The sale will categorically not result in private investors setting the terms or operating the collection of repayments. Loans in scope will continue to be serviced by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Student Loans Company on the same basis as equivalent unsold loans. Investors will have no right to change any of the current loan arrangements or to directly contact borrowers. Furthermore, the Government's policies on student finance and higher education are not being altered by the sale. These older loans, the borrowers of which benefited from lower tuition fees and lower interest rates, are not in the scope of the current review of post-18 education and funding.

The sale represents an opportunity for the Government to guarantee money up front today, rather than fluctuating and uncertain payments over a longer period. That will allow the Government to invest in other policies with greater economic and social returns. We will proceed with the sale only if market conditions remain favourable and if the final value-for-money assessment is positive.

**Angela Rayner:** I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question, and I thank the Minister for turning up today. It is a shame that the Secretary of State is too busy talking about Labour's policies to come to this House to explain his own, because the Government last night snuck out a plan to sell another £4 billion of the student loan book, but they have once again told us nothing about their proposal. Will the Minister therefore tell us his Department's valuation of the loans that it is planning to sell? What value does the Treasury's Green Book place on them?

Does the Minister acknowledge that the National Audit Office found that his Department made a loss of £900 million on the previous student loan book sale and that £600 million in future income was lost? The sale was supposed to be subject to a so-called value-for-money test, so will he commit to publish the details of the test so that the House can scrutinise them? The Government have previously said that they will raise £12 billion by privatising student debt, so will the Minister tell us whether that is still their plan and state the total value of loans they are planning to sell? How was the figure of £12 billion reached?

Will the Minister confirm that when the sales go ahead the Government will lose a source of income for as long as 25 years in exchange for a one-off payment? Can he give us any justification for the policy of selling off an asset to flatter this Government's terrible position on national debt? With nearly £1 billion lost in the previous sale, just how low would the sale price have to go before the Government decided that selling simply was not worth it? In short, how much public money do we have to lose before Education Ministers start learning their own lessons?

**Mr Gyimah:** I object to the hon. Lady's point that the loan sales plan was snuck out under the radar. The proposal was set out in a written ministerial statement for the House to see, which is obviously why the Opposition spokesperson is in a position to ask an urgent question today. Student loan sales in this country have happened over nearly two decades. This is not new, and it started with two sales of mortgage-style loans under the previous Labour Government in the late 1990s. It was that Labour Administration in 2008 that passed the enabling legislation for the current sales. As I have said, the sale will not affect borrowers, who will continue to deal with the Student Loans Company.

The National Audit Office did refer to the write-down of the loan book, but anybody who has studied accounting will know that the present value of a future income stream will be lower than the value if one waited 30 years. In capturing some of that money, the Government can invest in vital public services today, and that is the rationale for selling the student loan book—the previous Labour Government saw that rationale as well.

The sale will also be good for the taxpayer. Once people have been to university, it serves no public purpose to have the money tied up. The sale will release that money to invest in other priorities. On the valuation, the face value of the sale is £3.9 billion, but what we will do and how we will look to proceed will ultimately depend on market conditions.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What is the Minister's range of estimates for how much money the sale might raise, and will he confirm to the House that any money raised will be reinvested in other public services?

**Mr Gyimah:** My hon. Friend will be aware that money raised from student loan sales goes to the Treasury, which makes a decision about in which public services to invest that money. This ultimately means that the taxpayer gets some of the reward now, rather than having to wait for 25 years. We are working with professionals on the range of estimates and I am happy to share it with my hon. Friend when we have the answer.

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): This policy highlights the limitations of how this Government assess value for money and measure the cost of student loans over time. It prompts the question which Department has it right: the Department for Education or HM Treasury. This is clearly another example of the UK Government selling off assets for short-term capital gain. Will the Minister confirm how much of the student loan book he intends to sell off? What assurances can the UK Government give that the selling off of the remaining tranches of the student loan

[*Martyn Day*]

book will achieve long-term benefit for the taxpayers? And why are the UK Government devaluing assets and selling them off for less than they are actually worth?

**Mr Gyimah:** The sale remains subject to market conditions and a value-for-money assessment, but I will not be taking lessons from the Scottish National party on student finance. The SNP has created a system that actively works against the disadvantaged in Scotland. We have a system that is funding our universities well and helping the disadvantaged.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for his answers. Can he give me and my constituents, either students or borrowers, an assurance that whoever buys this loan book will have no access to personal data and no contact or involvement in setting the rates for the loans?

**Mr Gyimah:** My hon. Friend has my categorical assurance that that will not happen.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister must know that those in the financial services sector—the sort of people who buy these loan books—are the least trusted people in this country. Is it not a fact that there are hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of former students out there with some £50,000 of personal debt who are extremely worried about what will happen to the debt sold to these unscrupulous people?

**Mr Gyimah:** The loans we currently have are income contingent and are collected through the tax system, so even when the loans are sold off, the new owner of the loans has no means or mechanism to contact the students or chase them for payment.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Minister seems to be saying that he is selling off the student loan book to invest in the public services that his Government have slashed. Given that it is the end of austerity, should it not be possible to invest in those public services without privatising the financing of our higher education and the debt of so many students?

**Mr Gyimah:** All the Government are doing is trying to capture an income stream that we will get over 25 to 30 years. This is money due to the Government and the Government are coming to a financial arrangement that allows the money to be captured today. As the last Labour Government saw fit, so this Government see fit, in a sensible and prudent way, to manage the Government finances.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): How many accountants does the Minister know who would advise their clients to sell off an asset worth £3.5 billion for less than half that?

**Mr Gyimah:** The final sale price will be determined by market conditions, but it makes a lot of sense in terms of the time and the value of money for the Government to capture those assets now.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Surely now, like at no other time, we should be educating our country as best we can for the future, particularly in view of the uncertain times ahead. Does

the Secretary of State not agree that this House has the right to demand that all the money thus received is spent on education and only education?

**Mr Gyimah:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that promotion, but I am not the Secretary of State. If he is willing to lobby the Treasury on my behalf, I would be delighted if all this money were to be spent on education.

**Ruth George** (High Peak) (Lab): The value of these loans is raised by the extortionate interest rate being charged to ex-students—at 3% above the retail prices index, it is currently 6.1%, which is far higher than the rate for any other loan available on similar terms. Have the Government made an assessment of the impact of these loans and repayments on young people's ability to find housing, buy a home and get a secure financial future?

**Mr Gyimah:** These loans are earlier loans and not affected by the current interest rate policy. I make it absolutely clear that whoever buys the loans cannot alter the terms of the loan. The post-18 review is looking at interest rates on existing loans, as well as a number of other aspects of the student finance system.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister elucidate how many students have yet to make any payments in terms of their loan obligations? What analysis have the Government made of why they have not yet made any payments?

**Mr Gyimah:** The hon. Gentleman, an experienced parliamentarian, will know that we have an income-contingent loan system. The repayment threshold has recently been raised from £21,000 to £25,000, thereby benefiting students to the tune of £300 a year. Deliberately designed into the system is a subsidy from the Government; we understand that 45% of students will not pay back the loans in full—that is the subsidy that goes into the loan system. The system means that no one is barred from going to university as a result of their personal financial circumstances.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): One benefit of being elected to this place last year was that I was able to pay off my student loan much quicker than I expected. As the Minister will be aware, it was arrested from my wages directly, in the same way as national insurance contributions and income tax. So why on earth would the Government sell off future revenue sources such as student loans, given that they would not dream of doing it for national insurance or income tax? This is absurd.

**Mr Gyimah:** The repayments are collected through the tax system, and that does not change at all. All that changes is that the benefits of the future income stream now accrue to someone else. That is done not only by Governments around the world, but by businesses. It is a simple fact that if we can capture the value of an uncertain income stream today at a reasonable price, it makes sense to do so.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): Have lessons from previous loan book sales informed the decision making on this tranche?

**Mr Gyimah:** I caught just the tail end of that question. If I understood it correctly, my hon. Friend was asking about the process and the decision making in the past.



We have been dealing with this for two decades in this place; under the last Labour Government there were mortgage-style loans, where loans were sold to private investors, who could contact students directly and chase them for the money. That has now changed under this system.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Will the Minister tell the House at what level the Department is currently assessing the resource accounting and budgeting charge? Will he share his consideration of the Office for National Statistics review of the treatment of unrepayable debt on the Government books?

**Mr Gyimah:** The RAB charge was at about 35%, but as a result of raising the repayment threshold from £21,000 to £25,000, which in essence makes the loan system more generous, it now stands at 45%. The hon. Gentleman is right to ask about the ONS reclassification of the student loan book, but that is an exercise the ONS is going through and we have yet to hear what its recommendations are. When we find out what those recommendations are, both the Department and the post-18 review will look at them and take the appropriate action.

**Mr Speaker:** It is very good of the Minister for Security and Economic Crime to drop in on us; he is just in time for the next urgent question and we are greatly obliged to him, but I note that the shadow Minister is not yet present, which is mildly disappointing. It was disappointing that the Minister left it as late as he did, but there is obviously not always very good communication between Whips Offices and ministerial offices. We should now proceed with the urgent question, because the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant)

is present, although if people wish to raise points of order, I might be tolerant of them. There appears to be no great appetite for points of order at this time—

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As a new Member of the House, although I have managed to get on to the Front Bench, I was wondering whether you could guide me on what happens under these circumstances. Am I able to assist Mr Speaker in his dilemma?

**Mr Speaker:** Well, I thought it would be useful if the Opposition spokesman were here, but there is no formal requirement for that person to be present, because the question is of course to the Minister, so as long as a Minister is present, that suffices. What happens otherwise is one or other of two things: either a very helpful Member—perhaps even a shadow Secretary of State—pops up at the Dispatch Box to raise a very worthy point of order, which I take my time in responding to, or alternatively it is necessary for there to be a temporary suspension of the sitting. That would be if a Minister were not present, but the Minister is present—

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Only just!

**Mr Speaker:** Only just. He should not be too proud of the fact that he is present, because he is only just on time, but at least he is here. The hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) has helped our proceedings, for which we are grateful, and we can now proceed. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), will no doubt get here as soon as he can and take up his place on the Opposition Front Bench.

**Chris Bryant:** Sometimes it helps to be loquacious, Mr Speaker.

## Foreign Fighters and the Death Penalty

10.56 am

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary to make a statement on foreign fighters and the death penalty.

**The Minister for Security and Economic Crime (Mr Ben Wallace)**: Thank you for your patience, Mr Speaker; I apologise. You were even more efficient in the conduct of the previous urgent question than normal, so I have had to run to the House to answer the hon. Gentleman's question.

The management of Syria travellers is not a new or emerging issue. Since the conflict began, approximately 900 people have travelled from the UK to take part, of whom 40% have returned and 20% are thought to have been killed. There have been several high-profile convictions in this country for terrorist activity linked to travel to Syria.

The Government take seriously their responsibility to protect the public. We have been consistently clear that where there is evidence that crimes have been committed, foreign fighters should be brought to justice in accordance with due legal process, regardless of their nationality. The appropriate process will always depend on the individual circumstances. Everyone who returns from Syria or Iraq can expect to be the subject of an investigation to determine whether they pose a threat, and they should be in no doubt that we will take the strongest possible action to protect our national security.

We have planned and prepared for the risk posed by British returnees as Daesh is defeated in Iraq and Syria, and we are using a range of tools to disrupt and diminish that threat, including prosecution under the full range of existing counter-terrorism legislation and the use of other powers such as terrorism prevention and investigation measures or temporary exclusion orders to help to manage the risk posed. We are going further by introducing new measures in the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill that will help to deal with the scourge of foreign fighters.

Our long-standing policy on the death penalty has not changed. We oppose the death penalty in all circumstances as a matter of principle, regardless of nationality. Decisions to provide assistance are taken in accordance with the Government's overseas security and justice assistance, or OSJA, guidance, introduced in 2011. The guidance clearly sets out the UK Government's policy in respect of the death penalty.

**Chris Bryant**: I like the Minister, but that was a load of sententious guff that has nothing to do with the question in hand. Yesterday, the Government marked World Day Against the Death Penalty by declaring, as the Minister has again today, that they are committed "to oppose the use of the death penalty in all circumstances as a matter of principle."

In the past, that has always meant that before co-operating with a foreign judicial system where the death penalty is in operation, we seek assurances in every case that the suspects will not face the death penalty; yet, as the Minister admitted on 23 July, the Government secretly decided earlier this year not to seek such assurances in the case of two foreign fighters. I want to see those

fighters face justice, but the people who lost family members to those people do not want them to face the death penalty.

The Minister claimed on 23 July that there was precedent for not seeking such assurances and he undertook to write to us; his precise words were that that would be our "summer reading". I got his letter late this Tuesday afternoon. He clearly does not understand the word "summer", but does he actually understand the word "precedent"? His letter says that this has happened on two previous occasions since 2001, but it point blank refuses to give any details whatever. According to the dictionary, a precedent is meant to be

"an earlier event or action that is regarded as an example or guide to be considered in subsequent similar circumstances."

So we cannot cite a precedent without citing any of the details, because we cannot consider whether it is a precedent unless we know what actually happened on the previous occasion.

Will the Minister give us any details of the two cases that he says happened since 2001? Can he confirm that one relates to a case in Thailand in 2014? If so, it is exactly the opposite of a precedent—it is an anti-precedent—because the courts then decided that the police had acted unlawfully and failed to have regard for public policy, and the Government's decision was struck down. The Minister also told the House in July:

"There was no request from the US Administration for us to vary our assurances."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 2018; Vol. 645, c. 728.]

I am sorry, but I do not think that that is true. Can the Minister confirm that, when the Home Secretary met the US Attorney General in May, Jeff Sessions made it absolutely clear that any request from the UK for the customary assurances was likely to result in political outrage in the Trump Administration and that is why the Home Secretary decided not to seek any assurances?

Will the Minister also confirm that the then Foreign Secretary wrote to the Home Secretary to say that this case was "unprecedented"? The truth is that the only thing that was unprecedented about this case was that the US Government barked and the UK cowed.

Mr Speaker, you know what I think really happened? The Government got the collywobblers. Jeff Sessions huffed and puffed and blew the Home Secretary down. The Prime Minister decided to kowtow to Trump, and the Government changed the policy secretly without telling this House.

**Mr Wallace**: I am old enough to remember "Jackanory" and I think that I have just heard a "Jackanory" narrative from the hon. Gentleman. Let me deal with his questions. He asserted that, in every case previously, we have always sought assurances. That has not been the case. I apologise for not getting back to him in time for his summer reading. We did have to go back into the previous Labour Government to find a number of cases; I am talking about a Government in which the hon. Gentleman was a Minister in the very Department where this was taking place. We discovered that one of the cases took place in a Labour Government after 2001.

Secondly, the details of mutual legal assistance arrangements, as the hon. Gentleman will know, are subject to strict confidentiality, because they are often

about individuals involved in an investigation. However, I can help him in his “Jackanory” story: the 2014 Thailand example that he has cited is not a case where this has happened; it has not been brought to my attention. Perhaps he has raised another case, but, certainly, the two of which I am aware do not relate to that case.

Furthermore, when the hon. Gentleman comes to talk about the policy of successor Governments, he should know that, in 2011, this Government brought forward, for the first time, through the OSJA, written guidance. It was very clear in paragraph 9 that, on some occasions, there were strong reasons for not seeking assurances in such cases. The policy before 2011, including the time when the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Government, was that a Government could exchange evidence without seeking assurances on the death penalty in “exceptional circumstances”—[*Interruption.*] I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that his Government did do it. Certainly, he was a member of the Government when one of these cases took place.

The reality is that the two individuals in question, who are suspects and innocent until proven guilty, are charged, or effectively viewed, as having been part of very, very dangerous and heinous crimes, including torture and beheading, against many, many people, and that they are held in a place of detention, effectively in a war zone in north Syria, by non-state actors. That means that the choices are stark for any Government charged with keeping people safe and trying to deliver justice for the victims.

We are guided by the overseas security and justice assistance. The Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary considered this guidance strongly, found that there were strong reasons and took the necessary decision that in this case we would share with the United States evidence on the condition that Guantanamo was not part of the process, but in this case we did not seek death penalty assurances.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Some of us, and most of our constituents, are a lot less squeamish about this than the Minister and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). Indeed, they take the view that these people had it coming, didn't they?

**Mr Wallace:** What these individuals who are suspected of an offence and many others have coming is justice. We will do everything we can to work with our allies to see that justice is administered in a way that follows due process and that takes place in a court of law, where there is a separation between the judiciary and the Executive, where people have a right to defence and to make an argument, and where the rule of law prevails. That is what they and anybody else who involves themselves in that type of terrorism has coming to them, and that is what we are trying to uphold.

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): May I also apologise for not being here at the start of the urgent question?

Wednesday was World Day Against the Death Penalty. The Foreign Office Minister in the other place spoke about the Government's absolute opposition to the death penalty. The Labour party also opposes the death penalty. It is barbaric and was rightly abolished in this

country more than half a century ago. Yet, at the same time, the Government have agreed to help the US in prosecuting El Shafee Elsheikh and Alexandra Kotey, who could ultimately face the death penalty. I will say no more on this specific case, as it is subject to a High Court challenge.

The Labour party makes it absolutely clear that those who commit abhorrent crimes should face the full force of the law, but in bringing people to justice we should never sacrifice the very values that those who wish us harm seek to attack. We are therefore rightly concerned following the Government's revelation that, on two previous occasions going back some years, the UK has co-operated with foreign states in cases involving the death penalty. Does the Minister agree that if the Government oppose the death penalty in principle, they must oppose it in every case without exception?

It was revealed in the court earlier this week that the Home Secretary had written to the former Foreign Secretary stating that

“significant attempts having been made to seek a full assurance, it is now right to accede to the mutual legal assistance request without an assurance”.

Can the Minister explain what “significant” means in this context? Also, what response was received from the US authorities when these requests for full assurance were made? Furthermore, what new material factor caused the Secretaries of State to conclude that assurance was no longer necessary, in contravention of the long-standing policy of successive British Governments and their commitments to opposing the death penalty in all circumstances? Why did the Government not renew the death penalty strategy in 2016? Is that an oversight? If not, when do they intend to come to the House to explain the matter? Finally, does the Minister agree that making exceptions undermines our own credibility on human rights issues around the world?

**Mr Wallace:** I think both the hon. Gentleman and I were slightly caught short by the speed of the previous urgent question. I will do my best to answer his questions. Our guidance for upholding our principled position on the death penalty and following MLA requests is contained in the OSJA, published in 2011. Paragraph 9(b) on the death penalty clearly states:

“Where no assurances are forthcoming or where there are strong reasons not to seek assurances, the case should automatically be deemed ‘High Risk’ and FCO Ministers should be consulted to determine whether, given the specific circumstances of the case, we should nevertheless provide assistance.”

It was our view that there were strong reasons not to seek assurances.

This case has no easy solutions. It is easy for everyone to say, “We want justice for the victims”, but the options before this Government, our security forces and our citizens do not include a magic wand to get people miraculously into a UK court or provide evidence that matches the statute book that we happen to have. The strong reasons that, we would say, mean that the rights of those individuals detained are better served by a judicial trial in the United States are that they have a better chance of proper representation in a court of law than if they were left in detention by non-state actors in a war zone in north Syria, sent to Guantanamo Bay—something that the Government oppose fully—or allowed to go back into the battlefield and wreak murder and

[Mr Wallace]

death in the same way that they have been accused of doing in the past. Those were the options on the table that we as Ministers, charged with keeping people safe and balancing our obligations, and implementing the Government's policy as set out in the OSJA, have to weigh up. We felt that there were strong reasons not to seek death penalty assurances when sharing the evidence for a criminal trial in the United States.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): My constituents in Kettering are as outraged as I am that 900 British citizens should have decided to go abroad and become foreign fighters engaged in armed conflict against members of Her Majesty's armed forces; 180 have been killed in theatre, 360 have returned and 360 remain at large. Why on earth are we not stripping these people of their British citizenship, not allowing them back into the country or, if they are allowed back in, trying them for treason?

**Mr Wallace:** My hon. Friend makes an important point and reminds us that we have to balance everyone's rights—the rights of my constituents to go about their business securely and safely and their right to life against the rights of other people to a fair trial and not to be subject to torture and other conditions. There are no easy solutions. Where we find we have the powers to deal with individuals we explore all of them, including deprivation of citizenship, royal prerogatives to prevent people travelling and prosecuting people in a United Kingdom court, as we have done in some cases where we have the evidence to do so. We recognise that over many decades there has been a deficiency in offences on the statute book such as in extra-territorial legislation; sometimes we might have evidence of travel but the intelligence cannot be submitted in court. That is why in the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill, which I am pleased to say the Opposition support, we have sought to improve the statute book so that we do not face problems like this in the future.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Government are tying themselves in knots over this. If it is the Government's position, as the FCO reaffirmed yesterday on World Day Against the Death Penalty, that they oppose the use of the death penalty in all circumstances as a matter of principle, it stands to reason that, no matter how heinous and barbaric the alleged crimes are—and they are—if individuals are brought to justice, they should be not subject to the death penalty.

If that is the Government's position, why are they not willing to state that clearly and seek the assurances from the US Government that others suggest we should ask for? What is the point of the special relationship if we cannot speak clearly and honestly to what is supposed to be our closest ally?

Can the Minister confirm whether the US or other allied countries were the subject of the two other cases that have been raised in which assurances were not sought?

**Mr Wallace:** It is the policy of this Government to seek justice for the victims, in accordance with not only our principles but the OSJA guidance, which is the

published policy of this Government, introduced under the coalition Government in 2011. I asked whether I had received any representations from any Member of the House on the OSJA guidance while I have been Security Minister or whether my predecessor had. I have not seen anybody take issue with that guidance.

Our key aim is to seek justice. Our preference for Mr Elsheikh, for example, would have been to seek justice in this country if we had the evidence. The CPS was clear that it did not have the evidence to try them in this country. That was a challenge for us. Opposition Members say, "We want to see justice for everyone," but I have yet to hear a solution from them or what they would do in this type of case, other than to just let these people go who would ultimately wreak havoc and death on the streets of Syria, Iraq or the United Kingdom.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his answers so far. Can he give us an assurance that under this Government, Britain will not be a safe haven for terrorists or those suspected of terrorism? What further action can he take to exclude people seeking admission to this country who are suspected of terrorist offences?

**Mr Wallace:** Every week, I see cases of exclusions. We exclude people in line with the legislation. If they are from the EU, we have some powers to exclude, and if they are from outside the EEA, we have more powers to exclude. We exclude people and, as I said, deprive people of their citizenship where the intelligence evidence points to the fact that either there is no alternative or they pose a considerable threat.

The biggest challenge for the future is safe spaces—people's ability to communicate through end-to-end encryption, go online or go to a warzone such as north Syria, where they can play a part in planning and directing attacks. We, as a country, have very little reach into those places, either to affect behaviour or indeed get justice delivered. One of the biggest challenges in this case is that the detention of these individuals is not by a state; it is by a non-state actor in a prison in north Syria, which is a warzone. That is a real barrier to what we can do in the pursuit of justice for the victims of the crimes that these people are accused of.

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): May I remind the House that this urgent question is about the death penalty? People are against the death penalty either because it is inhumane or because there could be a miscarriage of justice, and we should remember that. We either believe in the death penalty or we do not. We do not have the death penalty in this country, which means that whenever we deal with these issues, we must at all times seek assurance that there will be no death penalty. That is the question here.

**Mr Wallace:** As I said earlier, this Government, the coalition Government and the Labour Government before it have, in exceptional circumstances or where there are strong reasons, not sought death penalty assurances. That has been the long-standing position of successive Governments under the OSJA. That is partly because, while we oppose the death penalty in principle, we have to balance the options on the table.

These two individuals are not United Kingdom citizens in this country; they are in a country where there is a war. People seem to forget that. If they were in this country, the courts would have much more power to gather evidence, put them on trial and so on, but they are not, and therefore we are guided by the OSJA, published in 2011 under the coalition Government. It seems, having looked through previous records, that other Governments have on occasions viewed something as exceptional or having strong reasons not to seek death penalty assurances.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It seems to me that what bedevils this extraordinarily difficult issue is establishing a dividing line between the powers of Ministers and the proper role of this Parliament, by which I mean the role of parliamentary oversight. Will the Minister undertake to consider that point and bring to the House suggestions as to how parliamentary oversight could be increased—if nothing else, to give the public genuine faith in the mechanism?

**Mr Wallace:** The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. MLAs, which are often operational and judicial processes, are incredibly sensitive until they are aired, such as in a case or a hearing, as we saw at the beginning of the week with the case of the two individuals in Syria. That is partly because to publicly air the details of an investigation or an MLA request and our police asking for that information, which could be about someone in the hon. Gentleman's constituency who is under investigation, could expose the fact that there was an investigation into that individual.

It is a delicate balance. However, I will agree to look at this, and I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss whether there is a way in which we can give details of cases once they have passed and it is felt that there is no risk, and to see what more we can do to scrutinise the practice of MLAs. To put them in context, there are hundreds of them every year.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his firm response to the urgent question. He stated that the Government are monitoring all those who have been involved in terrorist attacks in Syria and Iraq, and that they will be detained and held accountable for their activities. Can he assure the House that any foreign fighters guilty of any heinous crime will not be able to access the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, or any back door to the UK mainland?

**Mr Wallace:** One of the biggest challenges we face in our free and open democracy, where international travel is common and affordable for many people, is that that makes us vulnerable. The 900-odd people who travelled to Syria did so predominantly on scheduled flights from this country, and a number of those who have returned came via, for example, Turkey, often using flights from holiday resorts. We do our best to analyse passenger records, to prevent people from leaving this country or to stop them when they return, to examine their digital material and question them, and if possible to prosecute them.

The hon. Gentleman is right: the land border of Northern Ireland is a challenge. We work with the Irish Government to keep the island of Ireland's border safe;

we share intelligence and data where we can. The free travel area is exactly that, and in the past some individuals have used the Northern Ireland border to return to the United Kingdom. That is why we have always had some forms of control on the Northern Ireland border. He will know better than anyone in this House that it has never been the case that nothing has gone on at that border. The controls may have varied and been less solid, but there have always been checks on and around the border, and we have used those powers in the past.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Many of these fighters seek to undermine our democratic values by the most evil and despicable of means. Does the Minister understand the essential importance of not outsourcing our moral and ethical base by helping in the execution of the death penalty, against those democratic values?

**Mr Wallace:** I understand the hon. Lady's point about our values. As a former soldier, I have stood and upheld those values in pressing times, when the enemy or indeed the local population are very hostile; it is about us being better than them. In this specific case, however, the two individuals are not in our control; we cannot extradite them, move them or control them. This is about evidence—could we share evidence with another country, with an independent judiciary and the rule of law, that sought justice for its victims? The decision was made, based on our guidance, that in this case there was strong reason to do so without seeking a death penalty assurance.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): On 23 July, the Minister told the House:

"On Guantanamo Bay, again our position has not changed. The UK Government's long-standing position is that the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay should close. Where we share evidence with the US, it must be for the express purpose of progressing a criminal prosecution, and we have made that clear to the United States."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 2018; Vol. 645, c. 725.]

Can the Minister confirm that, contrary to that statement, the Home Secretary decided in this case not to ask for any assurances that the men will not be sent to Guantanamo Bay detention centre?

**Mr Wallace:** I have to disappoint the hon. Gentleman. When the agreement on the MLA was made, it was stated clearly that if any other use of the evidence was requested, they would have to come back here to get permission for that use. The Government's stated policy is to oppose Guantanamo Bay detention—[*Interruption.*] Hang on. "Any other use" covers every use they would like to make of the evidence other than a judicial trial. It was clear that for every use other than a judicial trial, they would have to come back and seek permission, and our position on Guantanamo Bay is clear. I made it clear in my meeting with the Department of Justice in April or May, that if they were to come back and their request was to do with Guantanamo Bay, permission would not be given. One can argue about whether we could have written back saying, "Not for Guantanamo Bay," but we said "any other reason", which could be Guantanamo Bay or going on holiday.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): When I have made foreign visits to countries that still apply the death penalty, I have been proud to say that the British Government categorically oppose its use. Can I say that now?

**Mr Wallace:** Yes, the hon. Gentleman can say that. This case is obviously before the courts, but it was an evidential request for a criminal trial and we followed OSJA guidance back in 2011, which is better guidance than the non-existent guidance of the previous Labour Government.

## Business of the House

11.25 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):** Welcome back everybody. The business for next week will include:

MONDAY 15 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the Offensive Weapons Bill.

TUESDAY 16 OCTOBER—Consideration of Lords amendments of the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Bill, followed by motion to approve a money resolution relating to the Overseas Electors Bill, followed by the Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration.

WEDNESDAY 17 OCTOBER—Opposition day (17th allotted day). There will be a debate on universal credit followed by a debate on social care funding. Both debates will arise on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 18 OCTOBER—Debate on a motion on ending exploitation in supermarket supply chains, followed by debate on a motion on World Menopause Day 2018. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 19 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

This week is Baby Loss Awareness Week, and we held an excellent debate during which 18 colleagues made valuable contributions. I remind colleagues that the exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall is still open for viewing. Today the Illegal Wildlife Trade conference returns to London. Having attended the last IWT conference in Vietnam as the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I am delighted to see the progress that we as a country are making in helping to stamp out that appalling trade. Today is also International Day of the Girl, and during this centenary year of some women getting the vote, it is important that we support and encourage every girl to reach her full potential.

**Valerie Vaz:** I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business.

“Mamma Mia!”, Mr Speaker, we have only four days of business, and nothing for the week after. If this was an exam paper, the Government would have an “F” for fail. I do not know whether the Leader of the House knows something that we do not when she said that “a week changes a lot.” I do not know whether she was referring to the Business of the House, or to whether the PM will lead her party into the next election. She could have said that the Prime Minister is a “Super Trouper.”

Is it too much to ask for the dates of the February and Easter recesses? I will give the Leader of the House a clue: Easter is on 21 April, so it cannot be difficult to work recess dates around that. Will she press the Government on fixing those dates? It seems that the Government are breaking conventions and are in chaos. I do not know where you were, Mr Speaker, when you found out that the Budget will be on Monday 29 October,

but the date was on Twitter, which shows no courtesy to the House. The Government seem to be making it up as they go along.

I want to raise another breach of convention with the Leader of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) was not invited to the launch of a frigate in his constituency. He tried on a number of occasions to contact the Defence Secretary, but he was not invited. Later, it seems that the Defence Secretary was with Members of his own party, including the hon. Members for South West Devon (Mr Streeter), for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), and for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). Was it a ministerial or a private visit? My hon. Friend has a lot of correspondence, so could I ask the Leader of the House to look into the matter and provide him with a response?

More chaos and incompetence. The Secretary of State for Education was reprimanded on Monday by the UK Statistics Authority for his misuse of statistics, yet two days later the Prime Minister repeated the same statistics. Is anybody speaking to the Prime Minister to let her know about this issue? She said to the House that next year

“per pupil funding is being protected in real terms.”—[*Official Report*, 10 October 2018; Vol. 647, c. 133.]

However, the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that per pupil funding is projected to fall in the next fiscal year. Will the Leader ensure that my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Education receives a response to her letter to the Prime Minister, and could the record be corrected? I am sure the Prime Minister would not want to mislead the House.

More chaos: the Government flagship policy on universal credit is causing real hurt to people. We now have the intervention of two former Prime Ministers. Half of all lone parents and two thirds of couples with children stand to lose £200 each month. Is that correct? That is what the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions allegedly said to the Cabinet. We want to know in this House whether that is true. We will be having an Opposition day debate on universal credit. I hope the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will give us an impact assessment and clarify her remarks. More importantly, will the Leader of the House guarantee that the regulations for the migration to universal credit will be debated on the Floor of the House, and not in some upstairs Committee Room?

The Government are sticking their heads in the clouds—or in the ozone layer, while we still have one. Their response to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report has been muted. The report said that unprecedented changes to limit global warming are needed across society and across the globe, yet the Government are continuing to reduce feed-in tariffs, next generation tariffs and export tariffs. May we have an urgent debate on this issue? One of the greatest gifts we can leave to the next generation is to act now on climate change. This is not a short-term game.

We have had our last summer in the EU. We all agree with the leader of the Democratic Unionist party, when she said:

“What we need to see is the legal text.”

Yes—her and everybody else. We all want to see the text on what the backstop will be for a border in Northern Ireland. And I am sure the Prime Minister will want to update the House on discussions with Gibraltar.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I want to thank you for your statement on Tuesday. The verdict from the inquest into the innocent victims who died in the Westminster attack was announced on Wednesday, sadly on the same day that the Prime Minister gave her speech to the Tory party conference. I do not think it was mentioned in that speech. I want to add my condolences to the families and friends of PC Keith Palmer and the other innocent victims of the attack. It cannot have been easy to relive that day in public. I am sure the House can agree, in consultation with PC Keith Palmer’s family, on a suitable prominent memorial to him.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I would like to start by echoing the hon. Lady’s tribute to PC Palmer and by paying tribute to the courage of his family and friends in what they had to go through in the inquest. It was the most appalling and harrowing story. For many who were involved, either as witnesses or just being in lockdown in this place, as so many of us were, it was a horrible reminder of what happened. I would like to reassure everybody that the security not only of those who work here but those who protect us is absolutely paramount. There have been a number of meetings that you, Mr Speaker, and I have held and taken part in, which seek to ensure that we do everything possible to keep people here safe. I thank the hon. Lady for her remarks.

The hon. Lady calls the Prime Minister a super trouper. I have to agree. I think that would be a good way to describe her. This is an extraordinarily difficult and delicate time in the Brexit negotiations and the Prime Minister has shown her commitment to getting a good deal for the United Kingdom and for the EU27. I think we should all stick with her and allow her the room to be able to fulfil those negotiations.

The hon. Lady asks about Christmas and Easter recess dates. I absolutely assure her that I will give those to the House as soon as possible.

The hon. Lady mentions the launch of a frigate to which her hon. Friend was not invited. I will happily investigate that and if her hon. Friend wants to write to me, I can take it up on their behalf. Otherwise, I will respond to the hon. Lady directly.

The hon. Lady asks about the Department for Education’s statistics. What I can say to her is that the proportion of children in schools whose last Ofsted judgment was good or outstanding has risen from 66% in 2010 to 86% in March 2018. That is really good news for young people’s skills and getting a good education. That translates as 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools than in 2010. All hon. Members should be delighted by that—I know I am.

The hon. Lady asked about universal credit. I encourage her not to believe everything she reads in the press. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has made clear, we are ensuring that nobody sees a reduction in their benefits when they move on to universal credit. Some £3.1 billion in transitional protection is being provided.

The hon. Lady asked about the report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. She is absolutely right that it is a really key report. It should act as a rallying cry for Governments around the world to innovate, invest and raise ambition to avert catastrophic climate change. But we should all be proud that in the

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

UK we are showing that carbon abatement and prosperity can go hand in hand. We lead the world in clean growth; we have cut our emission by more than 40% since 1990 while growing our economy by more than two thirds.

There is therefore much to be pleased about and to celebrate. I wish that hon. Members would look at the good news and not only at what they read as bad news. They should celebrate some of the achievements that the UK is promoting, including today, the first day of our international conference on the illegal wildlife trade, where the UK has much to be proud of.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the mis-selling of life insurance policies to the over-50s? Too often our constituents find that they have been paying more into the schemes than they will actually receive on their death, and if they try to cancel the policy they lose everything.

**Andrea Leadsom**: My hon. Friend raises an important matter that will be of interest to his constituents and many others. What I can tell him is that with a whole-of-life insurance plan a buyer chooses to pay a fixed premium at the outset of the policy. That is then payable until death, with a guaranteed cash amount paid out on death, which means that such policies pay out regardless of whether or not the buyer has paid less or more in total than the lump sum advertised. However, if his constituent feels that the arrangements entered into were unclear or misleading at the time, my hon. Friend should certainly contact the Financial Conduct Authority on their behalf.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. Well, it looks as though the shortest romance in political history is coming to an acrimonious end. With the romance forged in the passion of a £1 billion dowry, how could the Government possibly have resisted the abundant charms of the cuddly Democratic Unionist party? Now it is to be sunk by a border between them as deep as the Irish sea, as these star-crossed political lovers will now bring themselves down as well as the country. May we therefore have an urgent debate on party political partner counselling to see whether there is anything we could possibly do to rekindle some romance in that very special relationship?

What are we going to do about Chequers, the EU deal that now must not be mentioned, except of course in the context of “chuck” from the Brexiteers on the Government Back Benches? Before the conferences recess, Chequers was all the Government went on about, but now there is nothing—zilch; nada. Apparently there is to be a vote on whatever deal is on offer, if there is one. It is probably the most important debate and vote that this House will undertake in a generation, and it could be in a few short weeks’ time. It would be totally unacceptable if the vote is put on a “take it or we burn the house down, no-deal, leave it” basis. Can the Leader of the House therefore give us her view on how the debate will be framed, what sort of motion there will be and what options will be available to the House?

Meanwhile, in Scotland we have Project Ars—I will not give the last letter, Mr Speaker—the codename for the not-so-secret mission given to Scottish Conservative Members of Parliament to stop the prime ministerial ambitions of the former Foreign Secretary. Apparently they have polling suggesting that such is his popularity in Scotland that, were he ever to get near No. 10, they would all be wiped out. Knowing the Scottish Conservative Members as I do, and I do know them quite well now, I know that they will only go and make an ars—I will not give the last letter—of it. May we therefore have a debate on covert political missions, to consider what we could do to properly resource and facilitate Scottish Conservative Members so that they are successful?

**Andrea Leadsom**: I really do not know where to start; perhaps with a helpful Abba reference—“Knowing Me, Knowing You”, it was always going to be like this. The hon. Gentleman is trying to hide behind the DUP, when in fact it is the SNP that has done far more during this passage of legislation to try to harm the prospects of a good Brexit for the United Kingdom than any other party. My hon. Friends on the Conservative Benches who represent Scottish constituencies take the fight to the SNP every week, which is a matter for some merriment on this side of the House.

The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point about the negotiations for Brexit, and he is right to point out that they are at a critical stage. They are very delicate negotiations. It was always clear that they would be complex and it would not be possible to give an hourly, daily or even weekly account of precisely where we were. It was also clear that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. All hon. Members need to give the Prime Minister the opportunity to finalise an arrangement that is 85% agreed. The arrangements on the Northern Ireland issue and the future trading arrangements need to be given the space to be properly negotiated, and that is what a responsible Parliament will do.

**Mr John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Keats said:

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness”.

But we know from the national journal *The Mail on Sunday* that parks and open spaces across this country are being lost, eaten up by greedy developers and unprotected by careless councils. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Communities, Local Government and other things to come to the House and set out how he intends to ensure that parks are protected through planning guidance, ring-fenced funding and so on? Future generations deserve their taste, their touch of earthly paradise; not to be confronted with concrete jungles where once trees grew and birds sang.

**Andrea Leadsom**: I am sure that my right hon. Friend and I would agree about the need to deliver more new homes so that people are able to have a home of their own, but it is also important to be clear that local authorities would have to show that they have exhausted all other reasonable options, including brownfield and joint projects with neighbouring authorities, before they could tackle the green belt. He is right to prioritise



protections for parks, and I am sure that he will find an opportunity, perhaps at next week's Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions, to raise the issue directly with Ministers.

**Mr Speaker:** I very much hope that the right hon. Gentleman enjoyed his answer from the Leader of the House as much as I enjoyed both question and answer.

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** How will we know?

**Mr Speaker:** Well, we will not know, but the right hon. Gentleman is smiling and looks content. I notice that some observers were much smitten by his eloquence, and we are deeply obliged to him.

**Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op):** Many of my constituents are suffering because of the way in which assessments for personal independence payments are being made. There is growing concern as universal credit is to be rolled out across Liverpool. Will a Minister make a statement about what is actually happening on the ground, rather than taking cover in generalised statements that often hide the reality of acute hardship for people in need?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises an incredibly important issue. She will be aware that Work and Pensions questions will take place on Monday 15 October, and there will be an Opposition day debate on universal credit on Wednesday. She will also be aware that the Government are spending more than £50 billion a year on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions. That is a record high, and up more than £9 billion in real terms since 2010. However, we all have constituency cases on these issues and we seek to raise them directly with the Department, which is always responsive. I encourage her to raise particular issues directly with Ministers.

**Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con):** The Leader of the House will be aware that Northern Ireland has been without proper government since January 2017. News of a Northern Ireland Bill that will give the Secretary of State significant new powers is very welcome, but can she say when it will be published, and what timetable she envisages to ensure that it is given proper scrutiny in this place?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As my hon. Friend knows, our absolute priority is to secure a basis for political talks and to re-establish at the earliest possible opportunity a locally elected, democratically accountable devolved Government who work for everyone in Northern Ireland. As he says, a Bill to facilitate certain decision making in Northern Ireland is under consideration. It will be published shortly, and there will of course be ample opportunity for the House to consider it.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, Mr Ian Mearns.

**Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab):** As always, Mr Speaker, I am very grateful.

I thank the Leader of the House for her business statement, and for mentioning Monday's very important and moving debate to mark Baby Loss Awareness Week.

On the same day, owing to time pressure from other business, we lost a second debate on the important subject of children's services, which must now be rescheduled.

I note that the Leader of the House did not tell us what would be happening during the week beginning 22 October. We already know that the Budget debate will begin on 29 October and culminate on 1 November, which means that there will be no Back-Bench business during that week. Will the Leader of the House try to secure some time for the week beginning 22 October? There is one time-sensitive debate—an important debate about Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Awareness Week—that we hope can be slotted in, and if we could be given some time during that week, we should be very grateful.

**Andrea Leadsom:** Of course I am always very keen to hear about the priorities of the Backbench Business Committee, and I always seek to provide time for its debates whenever I can. It was very unfortunate that Tuesday's debate on children's social care could not take place, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will find another opportunity to schedule it, and I will certainly help as much as I am able to.

**Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con):** On Christmas day last year, 15-year-old Abbie Main from Elgin died from a rare form of cancer. She had lived with that for more than four years, and during her time with the condition her wish was to raise money for, in her own words, "hospitals and stuff", under the name "Abbie's Sparkle Foundation". So far the foundation has raised thousands of pounds, which it has distributed locally and nationally. Last weekend, Abbie's 18-year-old brother, Cameron, scaled Ben Nevis five times in 24 hours, in terrible conditions—wind-chill temperatures were as low as minus 12° C—and raised £6,000 for Abbie's Sparkle Foundation. May we have a debate to celebrate all our great local fundraisers, and also to commend inspirational young people such as Abbie Main, who came up with that foundation at such a difficult time in her far too short life?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am in awe. What a fantastic family they must be, given that Abbie gave such a commitment and inspirational lead, and her brother achieved such an incredible feat. I am sure that I could not have managed to scale Ben Nevis even five times, let alone the seven that he sought to achieve.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to so many charities throughout the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend, who is a great champion for his constituency, might well want to seek a Back-Bench debate so that we could congratulate all those who do so much on a voluntary basis.

**Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** This is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. During the recess, a group of women from Mirfield, in my constituency, held a "half monty" event. They had all been touched by breast cancer, and some had suffered from it themselves. They "dared to bare", raising more than £10,000 for local cancer charities. Some showed off their mastectomy scars for the first time. It was an incredibly emotional but, equally, phenomenal evening. Will the Leader of the House join

[Paula Sherriff]

me in congratulating those amazing women, and may we have a debate about breast cancer, given that this is Breast Cancer Awareness Month?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises an incredibly important issue. I have family members who have been affected by it, and I can absolutely imagine the courage that it would take to “dare to bare”, as she puts it. I strongly encourage her to seek a Westminster Hall debate, for instance, so that all Members can share their constituents’ experiences.

**Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): Local post offices are typically independent private businesses and they provide important and valuable services to their communities. They draw their income from the post office services they provide, and while they have other income streams to try to make sure that they are viable, they can still fail. May we have a debate about the importance of local post offices and what can be done to ensure continuity of service when a business, such as the Cold Bath Road post office in my constituency, fails?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend often raises significant constituency issues, and I am sorry to hear about the closure of that post office in his area. He is right to highlight the fantastic job that post offices do in all our communities, including providing basic banking services when bank branches shut down. I encourage him to seek a Westminster Hall debate so that all colleagues can make contributions on what more can be done to ensure that post offices are sustainable.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House, surely any debate on universal credit should, given current circumstances, be in Government time, not Opposition time. We are all dealing with its deleterious consequences, which are affecting the poorest and most vulnerable of our constituents. Will the right hon. Lady give one assurance that any regulations relevant to UC will be debated here on the Floor of the House, not upstairs?

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, I think all hon. Members must acknowledge that universal credit is a better, simpler, more flexible system that is helping more people into work. It is absolutely the case that many people found the old system incredibly complicated, involving numerous claims to repay benefits that they had received. This is a simpler system that supports people getting into work, and the evidence is that it is succeeding.

The hon. Gentleman asks whether any statutory instruments can be debated in the Chamber. He will be aware that there are procedures for the Opposition to work within the usual channels to seek such an agreement. He will also be aware that this Government have given more time in the Chamber for debates on statutory instruments than any Government since the early 1990s.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I want to raise a serious matter. I look for a statement from the relevant Minister at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on the democratic functions of

local authorities following a sham situation on Harrogate Borough Council. A panel of elected councillors refused a planning application by 11 votes to one for an inappropriate development on the border of Wetherby in my constituency, only for a locum legal adviser, Noel Scanlon, to tell councillors they had reached the wrong decision, forcing them to vote again, but not before a private meeting away from the public gaze had been held. The original result was then overturned by nine-nil in favour. I fear that we are heading towards a situation in which if mandarins do not get their own way, they simply call for further votes to overturn the decision they did not like.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend, who is a strong champion for his constituency, is right to raise what sounds like a very frustrating situation. He will appreciate that I cannot comment on that specific planning case, but I can tell him that although planning committee members are not obliged to follow the recommendations of officers, the law does require that planning decisions are made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, so local opposition or support is not in itself a ground for refusing or granting planning permission unless for valid planning reasons. My hon. Friend might want to seek an Adjournment debate to discuss the specific case directly with Ministers.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Given today’s intervention by Sir John Major, the former Conservative Prime Minister, which absolutely slams the roll-out of universal credit in spite of what the Leader of the House has said, will the Leader of the House reveal whether the draft regulations—not what is in the press—will be amended before they come to this House, when exactly they will be coming to this House, and whether, as my hon. Friends have asked, they will be debated on the Floor of the House? The damage being done now, let alone the damage that will be done next year, cannot be overestimated.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I say again to the hon. Lady that the Government are determined to continue with the roll-out of universal credit because it is helping more people back into work. [Interruption.] The Government have also, however, been determined to improve the system as we roll it out, which is why it has been piloted. Following lessons learned from the pilot roll-outs, we have raised advances to 100% of the first month’s payment; we have made it quicker and easier to get those payments so that anybody who needs it can get paid on the very first day of their claim; we have scrapped the seven-day waiting period; and we have formed a new partnership with Citizens Advice to help people to claim universal credit. All these measures have been taken as a result of the sensible proposals made in this place and by constituents. Nevertheless, the roll-out will take place, and we are making sure that no one sees a reduction in their benefits when they are moved on to universal credit.

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Two weeks ago, at the Aberdeen and Grampian chamber of commerce Northern Star business awards, I was delighted that two companies in my constituency, Macphie of Glenbervie and Glen Tanar Estate, were

recognised as finalists for the work that they do with local schoolchildren. I am pleased to say that Glen Tanar Estate won for the work that it does with Aboyne Academy. Will my right hon. Friend recommend a means by which such companies, which do so much for communities and young people across the UK, can be recognised at national level?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is a great champion for his constituency, and as he knows, raising those excellent achievements in this place gives recognition to those businesses that are truly helping their communities. I suggest that those enterprises could apply for the 2020 Queen's awards for enterprise, which the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy manages on behalf of the Crown. I particularly suggest that they could be eligible under the promoting opportunity category.

**Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab):** Capita has failed to bring in 90% of the recruits that our Army needs. This shocking performance undermines the defence of our country. May we have a statement from the Government urgently, setting out how they will ensure that our Army gets the soldiers necessary for our security?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I was unaware of the important issue that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I encourage him in the first instance to raise the matter of Capita with Ministers at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on Tuesday 16 October. There will be a further opportunity to raise the matter on Monday 22 October in Defence questions.

**Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** Yesterday was the International Day of the Homeless, and the Secretary of State took the opportunity to announce the use of the £20 million fund towards the national rental deposit scheme. Also, Crisis, the well-known charity for the homeless, announced its report on how we can end homelessness once and for all. May we have a debate in Government time on all the projects that the Government are implementing to end homelessness in this country?

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, I should like to pay tribute again to my hon. Friend for his Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which the Government were proud to support. It creates new duties on public bodies, from the NHS to prisons, to enable interventions at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness. That is absolutely vital. He is right to point out the 48 projects right across the country that the Government are supporting to try to prevent rough sleeping. It is unacceptable that we have people sleeping rough in this country, and the Government are committed to stamping it out once and for all.

**Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab):** This week has been a bumper week for Bradford. First, our rugby league news: the Bradford Bulls were returned to the championship. Secondly, this is the very first Bradford Manufacturing Week. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the Bulls, and all those involved in Bradford Manufacturing Week? May we have a debate in Government time on the skills that young people need to access manufacturing jobs?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising those fantastic achievements. She is a great champion for her constituency, and I am delighted to join her in congratulating the Bradford Bulls and all

those involved in Bradford Manufacturing Week. She has raised the important issue of what more we can do to give young people the skills they need to get into those valuable manufacturing jobs, and I absolutely encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can take this up directly with Ministers.

**Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con):** May we have an urgent debate on how an insurance company, such as Hastings Direct, can get away with selling a £15,000 car that it neither owned nor insured? A great injustice has been done to one of my constituents.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sorry to hear about that, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter in the Chamber. I obviously cannot comment on the specifics, but the Financial Ombudsman Service should provide proportionate and prompt resolution of any such case. It is vital that insurers treat customers fairly, and every firm is required to do so under Financial Conduct Authority rules, so he may like to take up this specific case directly with the FCA on his constituent's behalf.

**Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab):** May we have an urgent debate on predatory business takeovers? Until yesterday, constituents of mine had been taking forward a business called DTCC—originally called Avox—for 10 years, but a company called Refinitiv has taken over the business, immediately making 300 people redundant and offshoring the jobs to India. May we have an urgent discussion about appalling business practices that put people on the scrapheap when they have worked so hard for so many years?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sorry to hear about the company in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. The situation is worrying, and I encourage him to take the matter up directly with Ministers from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy at BEIS questions next Tuesday to hear what more they can do to help support those who have been told that they are losing their jobs.

**Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** Staffordshire County Council, like many others, faces a substantial deficit in 2019-20 as a result of the rise in social care costs for both children and adults. May we have a debate on all the ways that the Government can assist councils, such as through business rates retention, the relaxation of the referendum rules, the rate support grant and the better care fund? All those things could help to narrow or eliminate the gap that will otherwise result in many vital local services being removed across the country.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises an important issue that affects many constituencies, and he will be aware that we have short-term and longer-term plans for social care. In the short term, we have announced an additional £2 billion for adult social care, which will help to free up 2,000 to 3,000 acute hospital beds. We have also announced £240 million for social care to ease pressures during the winter, which will, for example, help to buy up to 72,000 domestic care packages to support people in their own homes. As for his specific concerns about Staffordshire, I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate to raise them directly with Ministers.

**Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP):** I have contacted Mr Alex Cruz, the chief executive of British Airways, which has a contract with this House,

[Patricia Gibson]

several times to raise legitimate constituent concerns, and I contacted Mr Simon Stevens, chief executive of NHS England, about a cross-border constituent concern on the advice of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, but both appear to have ignored legitimate concerns raised by MPs on the behalf of their constituents. Will the Leader of the House make a statement on the unacceptability of both public and private bodies refusing to engage with MPs who seek to present constituents' concerns about important matters?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady is right that all bodies, whether public or private, should give a proper response to MPs carrying out the legitimate process of representing their constituents, so I completely sympathise with her. If she would like to write to me about it, I can try to take the matter up on her behalf.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): It is tremendous that this Government are making an extra £394 million a week available for our NHS, but there remains a role for hospital charities, such as the Friends of St Cross, Rugby's local hospital. Since 1955, the charity has donated valuable equipment and facilities to improve the patient experience, and I spent time with some of its 200 volunteers only last week. May I join my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) in encouraging the Government to arrange a debate to support volunteers in this important sector?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. Volunteers have played a long and crucial role in supporting the NHS to care for patients and deliver services, and he is right to want to acknowledge the superb work of the Friends of St Cross and all volunteers as we celebrate the 70th birthday of the NHS. May I thank all volunteers on behalf of all hon. Members for their great contribution to our wonderful NHS?

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): Last week, I visited Jump Primary School, which has been working on the Send My Friend to School campaign. Do the Government endorse that campaign and may we have a debate in Government time about protecting students and teachers who are caught up in armed conflict around the world?

**Andrea Leadsom:** At my party conference, I was delighted to meet some students who are taking part in the Send My Friend to School campaign, so we are certainly very aware of it, and we support the excellent volunteering that goes on there. I am very glad that the hon. Lady has raised this issue; and of course, the Government do a huge amount on behalf of the United Kingdom to support all young people in getting the opportunity of an education wherever they are around the world.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): SpecialEffect, a wonderful West Oxfordshire charity that seeks to improve the lives of those living with severe disabilities through cutting-edge technology and video games, recently held its largest games industry funding event of the calendar year, called One Special Day. Thanks to the support of the worldwide gaming industry, it has raised more than

£300,000. This money will go a long way towards supporting SpecialEffect's phenomenal work and help it to transform the lives of young people. Will the Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to everyone at SpecialEffect and may we have a debate on how new technologies can be harnessed to improve the lives of those living with a disability?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I congratulate SpecialEffect—what a fantastic achievement. I also congratulate my hon. Friend, who I know has been a long-term supporter of this great charity. He is right to point out that small local charities make a huge contribution to communities across the country, and the Government are committed to supporting their independence and sustainability. I wish SpecialEffect the very best success in the future.

**Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): It is almost 100 years since the first Co-op party MP, Alf Waterson, was elected to this House. Notwithstanding the very strong support that Labour colleagues and others in the House show for much of the Co-op party's political agenda, as we are the third largest political grouping in the House, is it not time that we were allocated an extra dedicated Opposition day debate?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I will look into that.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): May I draw to the Leader of the House's attention early-day motion 1662, celebrating the work of the African Arts Centre in Ibrox in the Glasgow South West constituency?

*[That this House notes the work of the African Arts Centre, based in Ibrox, Glasgow, a charity organisation that aims to support, develop and empower communities through visual and performing arts; praises the organisation for the work it does on social inclusion with the youths of Govan, Ibrox and surrounding areas to try to tackle isolation using creativity as a vehicle for communication; congratulates the organisation on successfully securing £7,000 funding from National Lottery Award for All Scotland Grant from Creative Scotland to deliver 52 art workshops, two art exhibitions and to develop a website which will showcase events and artwork; and wishes them success with all its future projects and events.]*

I visited the centre last week and saw a fantastic arts exhibition to commemorate Black History Month. May we have a debate or a statement from the Government on how they are commemorating Black History Month, to allow Members of Parliament to celebrate the work of the African community, not forgetting the burning injustices of the past, particularly the western world's role in the slave trade?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue and congratulate his constituents who are celebrating African art and the history, which is so important and is often best expressed through art. I commend him for raising the role of the western world in the slave trade, and we are so proud to have also had a part in ending the slave trade. He might well want to seek a Back-Bench business debate so that all hon. Members can contribute that discussion.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): My constituent Colin Edwards died last Thursday in St Thomas's Hospital despite excellent care. That contrasted with the callous indifference his wife and family experienced at Lambeth Town Hall when they tried to register the death. Over

two days, they were turned away. They returned to Wales, where the Bridgend registrar registered the death and sent the details to Lambeth. They received no replies. They tried desperately to receive the death certificates. They contacted me and I emailed the chief executive, and today they have been promised that they will have death certificates tomorrow so that Mr Edwards can return to Wales to be buried sometime next week. The family have been traumatised by this difficulty. They would like a debate on why in an electronic age we cannot register deaths in the home that the person comes from with a communication sent electronically to where the person died, so that families are not traumatised in this way and met with indifference that adds to their grief.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am genuinely sorry to hear about the experience of the Edwards family, as that is really unacceptable and appalling; this House sends our condolences to them for their loss and for the way in which they have been treated. The hon. Lady raises an important question and she may well wish to seek an Adjournment debate, so that she can raise this specific case directly with Ministers.

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): May we have a debate in Government time on the implications for public authorities of the Treasury's draft valuation directions for non-funded pension schemes? The changes to the SCAPE—superannuation contributions adjusted for past experience—discount rate are a particular concern in Wales, as it is unclear where the funding will come from to pay for the increased employer contribution rates for the teacher, firefighter and local government pension schemes in 2019-20.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that question, and I encourage him to raise it directly with Ministers at Department for Work and Pensions questions on Monday.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): My trade union, Unite, has launched a period dignity campaign to encourage employers to provide a stock of women's sanitary products for any of their employees or visitors who might need them during their period. May we have a debate about this? More pressingly, will the Leader of the House support my representations to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority to consider women's menstrual products as we would consider soap or toilet paper: as something that could be provided on expenses in constituency offices?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a sensible and practical suggestion that I am happy to take away. On the broader issue of businesses providing products to deal with menstrual periods, he makes an equally good suggestion. Obviously, the Government do not seek to legislate on every aspect of corporate life, but he may well wish to seek a debate so that he can discuss this with other MPs and raise the issue more broadly, so that sympathetic companies might choose to take this action unilaterally.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): As we celebrate another fantastic Ryder cup win, it is appropriate to reflect on the role of Scunthorpe's Tony Jacklin. At a time when the Ryder cup was going through difficulty, he was

instrumental in rejuvenating the cup, as its most successful captain ever. As the only British golfer to win both the British and US Opens, his is surely the sort of achievement worthy of a knighthood. May we have a statement on how the nation can properly recognise Tony Jacklin's contribution to golf and wider public life?

**Mr Speaker:** He is a great British sporting hero—I remember him from my childhood. If I may be permitted, let me say from the Chair: what a splendid inquiry.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I must agree with you, Mr Speaker. I must also tell the hon. Gentleman that he will have made my son's day, because he is a big fan of Tony Jacklin and the Ryder cup. The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that this year's was something of a triumph, and we were all glued to our screens. He raises an important point and I recommend that he puts Tony Jacklin forward for an award—I am sure many Members from across the House might provide letters of support.

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): There has been a record number of Islamophobic hate crimes, a disproportionate number of which have been attacks on women with headscarves or on gentlemen with beards. We have seen the rise of populism and nationalism, with Muslims often being the target. May we have a debate in Government time not only to discuss this issue, but to seriously consider how to tackle it?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises an incredibly important issue. Any type of hate crime is absolutely unacceptable. We have to stamp out all forms of discrimination that lead to hate crimes such as the ones to which she is referring. I encourage her to raise this issue at the next Justice questions, a few weeks from now, so that we can discuss how we address the issue of hate crimes and Islamophobia.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab) *rose*—

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Chris—[*Interruption.*] Elmore.

**Chris Elmore:** I never thought I would outrank my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda.

**Chris Bryant** You don't!

**Chris Elmore:** On a more serious point, my constituent has been in and out of work, so he has now been told he has exhausted the number of universal credit advance payments he can receive. He is out of work now. He received his last pay cheque two weeks ago. He has even exhausted all his food bank vouchers. The Department for Work and Pensions has told him he will have to wait seven weeks for any sort of payment. Thanks to interventions from my office, he has been awarded £350 towards paying his rent—that is not enough.

May I ask the Leader of the House, most sincerely, for an urgent debate, in Government time, on the horrendous realities of the UC roll-out and the impact it is having on constituents of Members from both sides of the House? Please do not just refer me to DWP questions next week: we need a debate, because the realities of UC are truly abhorrent.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am extremely sympathetic to the hon. Gentleman's points, but he will be aware that the Opposition day debate on Wednesday is to be on the subject of UC and he will have the opportunity to raise this issue then, as well as at DWP questions on Monday, which is the appropriate place to raise it. I wish to repeat that we have been clear that UC is designed to simplify benefits for people. There are many examples—I can give him actual examples—of recipients of UC who have found it to be much easier to manage. We are making sure that no one sees a reduction in their benefits when they move on to UC. He raises a really important individual constituency issue, which he should raise directly with DWP Ministers on Monday.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I call Chris Bryant.

**Chris Bryant:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. You are so kind. May we have a debate on parliamentary jiggery-pokery, particularly in relation to private Members' Bills? A splendid private Member's Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), is going forward in 10 days' time, but the Government cannot decide what they are going to do about it. We would like them to support it.

There is another magnificent private Member's Bill, promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan), on parliamentary constituencies. It has strong support from Members from across the House, but the Government will not allow it to have a money resolution. Yet next Tuesday we are to have a debate to approve a money resolution relating to the Overseas Electors Bill, even though the Government cannot even get enough Members to serve on the Committee.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I would say to the second-priority Chris that I—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry, but it was Mr Speaker's decision—what can I say?

**Chris Bryant** If you change your mind, I'm the first in line—

**Andrea Leadsom:** I think you should clarify this matter, Mr Speaker. I would be happy to give way to you. [*Interruption.*] It appears that we do not want to delay and that Mr Speaker does not want to arbitrate on this matter.

I simply do not accept that the Government are blocking progress on private Members' Bills—far from it. We have seen excellent progress on these Bills. As the hon. Gentleman points out, we will have the chance to debate a money resolution for the Overseas Electors Bill next week. The hon. Gentleman's own Bill has received Royal Assent, as has the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill, which was promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake). We have had the money resolution for the Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill, which has now completed its Committee stage. A huge number of private Members' Bills are going through. In the 2005 Parliament, only 22 private Members' Bills received Royal Assent, whereas 31 did in the 2010 Parliament—if we include the 2015-to-2017 Parliament, the number is more than double the number in the 2005 Parliament. We are making excellent progress.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): The Home Secretary announced at the Conservative party conference that the Government would be adopting a public health approach to youth violence. That is extremely important and Members will know that it is one of the recommendations from the Youth Violence Commission. All I want to know is: when are we going to have a debate on this?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady has been closely involved with the Government's efforts on the serious violence taskforce and in bringing in a new crime reduction plan. She will be aware that a key focus for the taskforce has been prevention and ensuring that we avoid people getting into a life of crime and serious violence. I am not sure at the moment whether there will be a specific debate on that, but I will certainly take away her request. Obviously, she had a debate on this just last night and I am sure she was able to air her views then.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Last week, I met another constituent who was at the end of her tether with the Child Maintenance Service. My staff encounter the same poor service as my constituents: different advisers at each contact, conflicting information, wrong information, financial breakdowns that make no sense and the CMS not challenging the other partner sufficiently, with cases dragging on and on. The £50 compensation in some of these cases is insufficient for the stress caused. My office has even received information that breached data-protection laws. When we contact other MP helplines, they have real experts in resolution, but the CMS does not. When will there be a root-and-branch review of the CMS's performance?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important constituency issue, as he often does, and he is right to do so. If he wishes to write to me, I can refer the matter directly to Ministers.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Following the failed coup in Turkey in July 2016, the Turkish Government began a crackdown on human rights in many sectors of Turkish society, including education. That led to Turkey demanding the forcible repatriation of some 285 Turkish teachers working in schools in Pakistan, along with their families. Despite that being in violation of international law, many teachers have been returned and have faced arbitrary arrest, detention, and even torture by Turkish authorities. This is just another example of the worsening situation under President Erdoğan, a fascist dictator and demagogue who has suppressed human rights and does not respect the rights of religious minorities. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement or debate on this matter?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman often raises in the Chamber issues relating to the persecution of minorities, particularly on grounds of religious belief, and he is absolutely right to do so. I am aware that he has applied for a Back-Bench debate on International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day, and I sincerely hope that he gets the opportunity to share experiences, along with other Members, and to provide the focus so that the Government can respond.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** The prize for patience and perseverance goes to Mr Paul Sweeney.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the local community in Dennistoun in my constituency? On 29 September, a new war memorial was unveiled in the area to commemorate, as we approach the centenary, more than 5,000 men who lost their lives in the first world war. I particularly congratulate Jim Watson, who led the fundraising drive to raise £17,000 for the memorial, which was designed by Owen McGuire, a 12-year-old schoolboy at St Mungo's secondary school, and unveiled by 85-year-old Dick Gilmour, a veteran who served in the far east with the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles).

As we approach the centenary of the armistice, will the Leader of the House consider holding a debate in Government time on the legacy of the great war in communities throughout the country, particularly as the Dennistoun war memorial was subjected to a horrendous act of vandalism just before it was unveiled, showing that there is still a large amount of ignorance? People of all faiths and classes were involved in that war and their deaths were indiscriminate.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise the enormous sacrifice of all those who gave their lives and, indeed, those who kept our country going during the great war. I join him in congratulating all those in his constituency who have contributed to the successful establishment of a war memorial to commemorate those who died. I certainly agree that we will need to ensure that we have appropriate ways to remember those who died in the first world war. On 31 October in Westminster Hall, the Bundestag choir and the Parliament choir will be singing together to commemorate world war one; Members will be very welcome to attend that event and to take part in the commemorations.

## Rail Review: Terms of Reference

12.23 pm

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** I wish to update the House on the Government's comprehensive rail review, which we intend to use to build on the challenges facing a busy railway and in particular to deliver a network that is fit for the future and better serves passengers. I shall also update the House on the current performance of Northern and GTR.

For a generation before the Railways Act 1993, British Rail was in seemingly terminal decline. Passenger numbers were falling, stations were closing and short-term decisions were being made at the expense of the travelling public. The 1993 Act brought investment, new services and better reliability. A quarter of a century later, the situation is very different. Our UK rail network is at capacity in commuter areas, with many of the most intensively used lines in Europe. On many routes, it is simply not possible to squeeze more trains on to the network. As we now know, the railways were not in fact in terminal decline; they had been starved of investment. The period of privatisation has reversed the decades of decline and heralded the fastest expansion of our railways since they were built by the Victorians. It has also delivered billions of pounds of investment and radically improved safety. Our railways are now among the safest in the world.

Nevertheless, that welcome expansion has brought new, acute challenges. On major commuter routes throughout the country, the trains are packed each morning. Network Rail, which represents a third of the industry, based on spend, is nationalised. It is also responsible for more than half the daily disruption. But no matter whether it is a failure of the track, a fault with a train or a customer incident, it is because there is little resilience or margin for error in the system that, when things go wrong, the knock-on effect can last for hours. The problem is compounded because the railway is run by multiple players without clear lines of accountability.

When I took over as Secretary of State for Transport in 2016, I said that change was needed and started the process of bringing together the operation of the tracks and trains, which was split up in the 1990s so that we had single operational teams. That process is helping to overcome problems caused by fragmentation in some areas and creating a railway that is more responsive to passenger needs. I also said that that change needed to be evolutionary and not revolutionary, to avoid destabilising the industry, so we have started to shape alliances between the teams running trains and the teams running track to create a more joined-up and customer-focused structure.

The difficulties with the introduction of the new timetable over the summer and the problems that we are experiencing with many major investment projects has convinced me that the process of evolution is no longer enough. The collapse of Virgin Trains East Coast has also highlighted the need for radical change. Put simply, we need that change to ensure that the investment going into the railways from both the Government and the private sector results in better services for passengers and delivers the improved reliability, better trains, extra seats and more-frequent services that we all want to see.

[Chris Grayling]

Last month, my Department announced a root-and-branch review of how the rail industry works. Keith Williams, the deputy chairman of John Lewis & Partners and former chief executive of British Airways, is to lead the work, and I expect him to make ambitious recommendations for reform to ensure that our rail network produces even greater benefits for passengers and continues to support a stronger, fairer economy. Keith Williams' expertise in driving customer service excellence and workforce engagement will be incredibly valuable as we reform the rail industry to become more passenger focused.

Keith will be assisted by an independent expert panel from throughout the country, with expertise in rail, business and customer service. The panel will ensure that the review thinks boldly and creatively, challenging received wisdom, to ensure that its recommendations can deliver the stability and improvements that rail passengers deserve. It will be supported by a dedicated secretariat and will now begin to engage with the industry, passengers, regional and business representatives, and others throughout the country, drawing on their expertise, insights and experiences to inform the review.

The review will consider all parts of the rail industry, from the current franchising system and industry structures to accountability and value-for-money for passengers and taxpayers. It will consider further devolution and the needs of rail freight operators and will particularly take into account the final report of Professor Stephen Glaister on the May 2018 network disruption, which is due at the end of the year and to which I shall turn in a moment.

When we establish what we think is the right approach to mend our railways, it must be properly tested and scrutinised independently. I have today published the rail review's terms of reference and placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses, together with the names of the review's independent panel. The review will build a rigorous and comprehensive evidence base, and it will make recommendations regarding the most appropriate organisational and commercial framework for the sector that delivers our vision for a world-class railway. The private sector has an important part to play in shaping the future of the industry, but it is important that the review considers the right balance of public and private sector involvement.

Some have called for the return to a national, state-run monopoly, and for us to go back to the days of British Rail. There is an expectation that taking hundreds of millions of pounds of debt on to the Government books will magically resolve every problem. This fails to recognise that many of the problems that customers faced this year were down to the nationalised part of the railways. It also creates the false sense that a Government-controlled rebrand would somehow make every train work on time. Those who make this argument fail to tell passengers that the much-needed investment that is taking place today would be at risk, and that taxpayers' money would be diverted from public services to subsidise losses.

The review will look at how the railway is organised to deliver for passengers. It will look forensically at the different options, and then make recommendations on what will best deliver results in different areas of the

country. In autumn 2019, the review will conclude with a White Paper, which will set out its findings, and explain how we will deliver reform. We expect reform to begin from 2020, so passengers will see benefits before the next election.

I have commuted for most of my career—over 35 years—and I still do. I am proud to be in a Government who are supporting a major programme of investment in rail, from Thameslink to the TransPennine upgrade, with new trains in the north, south, east and west. However, we cannot stand by while the current industry structure struggles to deliver the improvements that this investment should be generating. So it is time for change.

The review will not prevent us taking every opportunity in the short term to improve passenger experiences. That is our focus and that is why we are committed to an investment of £48 billion in the railways over the next five years.

Professor Stephen Glaister's interim report has provided us with an accurate account of the series of mistakes and complex issues across the rail industry that led to the unacceptable disruption that passengers experienced earlier this year. We know that, in the north, delays to infrastructure upgrades, beyond the control of Network Rail, were a major factor in the resulting disruption. Richard George, the former head of transport at the 2012 Olympics, is now working with the industry and Transport for the North to look at any underlying performance issues so that they can be properly addressed.

In the four weeks ending 15 September, in the Northern rail area, more than 85% of services met their punctuality targets; the highest level delivered for Northern rail's passengers since the timetable introduction in May. Northern is now running 99% of the May timetable and is running more trains than were operating in that region before the May timetable. We are working with Transport for the North and the industry to plan further uplifts in services, while prioritising reliability.

In the coming months, passengers across the north will begin to benefit from the brand new trains that were unveiled last week. The first trains are now operating in parts of the Northern rail area. There will be more than 2,000 extra services a week. Every single Northern and TransPennine Express train will be brand new or refurbished as new, and every single one of the old Pacer trains will be gone.

I now want to turn to Govia Thameslink Railway, which has new leadership. The reliability of its services has improved significantly: since the introduction of the interim timetable in July, 85% of its trains arrived at their station on time, and that performance has been getting better. In addition, in the past week, the first of the new Class 717 trains that will run on its Great Northern routes began testing. GTR is now operating 94% of the weekday timetable that it intended to run from 20 May, including, crucially, all the services in the busiest peak hours. By December, it plans to introduce all planned off-peak services, but there is much more work to do to improve performance, particularly at weekends.

Since the disruption in May, there has been intense scrutiny from the Government and the regulator, the Office of Rail and Road, on what went wrong and why. GTR must take its fair share of the responsibility; its performance was below what we expect from our rail



operators. Officials in my Department are now taking action to finalise how we will hold GTR to account for the disruption. My hon. Friend the rail Minister will keep the House updated.

We need now to move forward and take action on these issues, particularly after the disruption that passengers experienced. We need to help passengers plan ahead; to ensure that we do everything we can to reduce delays and cancellations; and to ensure that we properly compensate disrupted fare payers. The review that I have announced today is very necessary. It will continue the approach and ensure that the rail industry is focused on putting the passenger first and that we maximise the benefits of this investment. The lesson of this summer is that it is now time for change and we will deliver that change.

12.33 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I wish to thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement, which was actually announced three weeks ago, on 20 September. Although the title of this statement is, “Rail Review: Terms of Reference”, he has not provided me with these terms or the names on the panel. Seemingly, the document sits in the Library, as yet unseen—a fat lot of use that is when we are here to discuss it.

The Department for Transport’s press releases are very fond of exaggerated claims, historical or otherwise, so the froth around the Secretary of State’s rail review announcement was to be expected. We were told that it would be “far-reaching”, “sweeping” and “root and branch”. Really? I am surprised that the Department did not say that it would be the most comprehensive rail review since the Victorian era, or since the time of Brunel, as it usually does. These absurd and ridiculous claims undermine rail policy debate and belie a tragic reality. His review is not far-reaching, sweeping or root and branch. It is none of those things. It is a predetermined prevarication and a way for him to cover up his disastrous failure to run the railway properly and to kick it into the long grass for a year. It offers precisely nothing to the millions of rail passengers who have endured months of misery since the timetabling crisis in May.

A Government review is one of the oldest tricks in the political book. It is usually a good way of kicking a difficult decision into the long grass, so fair play to him—or was it the Prime Minister’s idea? Under the Conservatives, over the past eight years, rail reviews have practically come along with the frequency of buses—McNulty, Brown, Shaw, Hendy, Bowe, Laidlaw, and Hansford. I could go on.

Is it not the truth that we do not need another review to tell us what is wrong with the railway? Why do we need a rail outsider to tell us what we know already? Is this the expertise that we need? Also, can the Secretary of State tell us how many days a month Keith Williams will contribute to the review? My sources tell me one day a month. Hardly worth the bother, is it? The fact that the permanent secretary at the Department for Transport was desperately ringing around retired rail executives urging them to join his review panel tells us something.

Does not this show that the Government are out of touch with the rail industry? What is more, the rail industry has called for public ownership to be considered

as part of the review—it is the Rail Delivery Group if the Secretary of State wants the reference. This review has no credibility in the rail industry.

I know that the Minister told a conference fringe meeting in Birmingham last week that rail franchising is broken—I am pleased that we can both agree on something, but we differ on how to move forward. He thinks that bolting together operations and infrastructure into individual partnerships on the east coast or Southeastern is the way forward for rail. In fact, his review is simply a 12-month prelude to justifying this proposal, which no one in the rail industry takes seriously or thinks is workable. It is ironic that, as an ardent Brexiteer, he is doing so much to perpetuate a rail operation system that enriches those foreign Governments who own the majority of rail franchises. His review offers nothing for the private UK supply side businesses, which are the backbone of British industry. Will the review consider the roles of the DfT or the ORR? Practically everything starts or finishes with the Department. Will he suspend all current franchise competitions while this review is underway—Southeastern, East Midlands and west coast? Will he come back to the Dispatch Box and confirm that he will now reward the failure of Govia by re-letting the Southeastern contract to it in the coming weeks?

The rail industry and rail passengers have had a battering this year with failed franchises, a timetabling crisis and cuts to promised investment. There is an ongoing lack of leadership. Will not this 12-month review create even more paralysis, confusion and uncertainty when rail desperately needs stability? It is unacceptable that passengers on GTR and Northern face further inflation-busting fare rises in January. Will the Secretary of State support Labour’s call for a fare freeze on those routes—in addition to compensation?

We need to put the railway back together as a unified whole. The British public are crying out for an accountable railway. They are desperate for a system that is simpler and more efficient. Above all, our railways need to be run in public ownership for the public interest, and his review will do none of those things.

**Chris Grayling:** I keep hearing from the Opposition that returning to British Rail would deliver transformation for the British public.

**Andy McDonald:** I didn’t say that.

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman says that he did not say that, but when he talks about an integrated state monopoly, what else is he talking about except for returning to the days of British Rail? Labour might give it a different name, but it will still be British Rail. The reality is that Labour Members cannot explain the benefits that their policy would actually bring, and their leader does not even know which part of the railway is privatised and which is nationalised. They say their policies will cost nothing, yet the Library says that even taking back control of the rolling stock will cost £17 billion. On the “World at One”, the shadow rail Minister could not even explain how Labour’s policy would work. *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) must not shout at the Secretary of State; he has had his go and others will have a go in a minute.

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman asked about supply-side businesses. Supply-side businesses in the UK are doing well at the moment because we are investing record amounts in infrastructure improvements and new technologies that will help performance on the railways. That is ensuring that we have a successful and now internationally competitive rail industry. The hon. Gentleman asked whether the review would look at the roles of the Department for Transport and the Office of Rail and Road. Absolutely; this is a root and branch review of the way the whole industry works.

The hon. Gentleman asked about franchises. As he knows I announced that information three weeks ago. I have taken the view that I do not want to remove the possibility of passenger benefits in the short-term—for example, the longer trains that I want to see on the Southeastern franchise. Therefore, I do not intend to halt a number of the franchises, but I have announced that I will not be going ahead with CrossCountry. Finally, he asked about costs in the industry. When I hear Labour Members line up with the consumer and insist that rail pay increases should be in line with the same inflation measure that everybody else uses, I will take them seriously on costs in the industry. But they do not; all they do is line up with the trade unions.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The Secretary of State alluded to the Glaister review, which was the last review that he commissioned. The interim report has revealed unmitigated incompetence from all parties involved—GTR, Network Rail and, I am afraid, the Department for Transport. How many more reviews, inquiries, investigations, statements and urgent questions will it take before GTR is at last stripped of its franchise, as all my constituents and those well beyond my constituency actually want?

**Chris Grayling:** As I said a moment ago, we are working through the final stages of our assessment of the position with GTR. The decisions that we take will be designed to deliver the best outcome for my hon. Friend's constituents and other passengers. I do not want to take a decision that works against their interest, and I am happy to talk to him about ensuring that we get this right.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement. During a previous statement on 4 June—after yet another rail shambles—I asked the Secretary of State to admit that the rail franchise system is broken and to do something to fix it. In that regard, I kind of welcome this review, as long as it is actually thorough and the Government abide by any conclusions that the system is broken and needs to be completely remodelled.

How are we going to get oversight of the rail experts who are needed to sit on the panel? After hearing the statement, I think that we can safely say that the term “rail expert” does not apply to the Secretary of State. Yet again, he argues that the new investment that came in after privatisation was somehow magically due to privatisation, not a change in Government rules that allowed private companies to borrow. Yet again, he blames Network Rail—a body that he is responsible for—and continues to duck his own culpability in the timetable fiasco. And then, in this statement, he talks about the absence of clear lines of accountability; I think we know who has responsibility.

With regards to terms of reference, we need to look at the value for money of the subsidy in the current system—£2.3 billion in 2016-17—as well as the value of public sector bids, and how foreign state-owned companies can come to the UK and make money to reinvest in their own national railways. We also need to look at the devolution to Scotland, especially as Network Rail is too large as it is; the performance of the Department for Transport, especially with regards to the tendering process and the mismanagement of the east coast main line tender; the performance of direct awards and the cost to the taxpayer; and the HS2 and Crossrail delays.

Will the Secretary of State stand up and rule out the privatisation of Network Rail? He seems to keep saying that the nationalisation of Network Rail is the problem. We do not want a repeat of the Tory Railtrack failure by privatising the state infrastructure. Will he rule out privatisation today?

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman continues to argue for the devolution of Network Rail, even though it was not recommended in the report on the powers that should be given to the Scottish Government. I will continue to say to that Scottish Government that when they actually run the rest of their responsibilities well, they will have a better case for arguing for additional responsibilities.

The review will look comprehensively at the structure of the industry. It is designed to deliver genuine change. I do not expect the industry to emerge from this review in the same shape that it is in today. It is important that we find a structure that works for the public and passengers, but I do not intend to transfer the ownership of Network Rail to the private sector.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome the statement. At the moment, there is much competition to gain a franchise, but very little competition once the franchise has been granted. Will the review take account of that and introduce more competition into the actual provision of services?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Competition needs to be a part of the way in which our railway works because it drives better performance for customers. Indeed, the presence of open access operators on the east coast main line has undoubtedly created a better competitive environment for passengers. Whatever structure emerges from the review, there must be a place for open access and competition. There are parts of the network where competition is impossible—it is very difficult to deliver on a single commuter network—but we should always aspire to have a competitive pressure on the industry in a network between major population centres.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Will this review consider whether Transport for Wales is given further powers to hold Network Rail to account for delivering improvements to railway infrastructure there? There must be clearer accountability to improve Wales's railways.

**Chris Grayling:** Of course, I have proceeded with probably the most substantial piece of devolution of infrastructure in Wales since privatisation, by handing over the valley lines to the Welsh Government to turn

into the Cardiff metro. There is a strong case for such an approach. I have also indicated to those leading Merseyrail that I am very happy to transfer their infrastructure to them. As part of the review process, we will certainly look at what the right approach to the issue of devolution might be.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): Like the Secretary of State, I regularly commute into this place and would like to see an improvement to the rail service that my constituents get, but many of the delays are due to Network Rail, not to Greater Anglia. In my view, the best way to hold the operators to account is to hit them in the pockets and ensure that people get fair compensation when trains are delayed. May I therefore encourage the Secretary of State to continue the work that he is doing to ensure that repayment mechanisms are as effective as possible across the country?

**Chris Grayling:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. We are now moving ahead with automated Delay Repay and the rolling out of 15-minute Delay Repay, which I know is a matter close to her heart; I hope and expect to bring that to her network in 2019.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State knows that there will be disappointment with his statement. It is not far-reaching enough and it is insensitive to launch something like this, which has aspirations really to change the rail sector, when he knows that the rail sector is a community of very dedicated people—staff and travellers. We all know that community very well, but he started off by rubbishing one part of it. That is not the way to build the community. Everybody in that sector—I admit that it is a strange sector—knows the confusion that came out of the botched privatisation by the John Major Government, because there are three partners that do not seem to come together. Those three partners will never come together unless we have leadership from the Secretary of State; that is woefully lacking today.

**Chris Grayling:** In all the conversations that I have had with people across the rail industry, I have met very few who disagree with my analysis about the need to bring back together the operation of the track and the train. What comes out of this review has to deliver a more joined-up railway.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's approach. In all the times that he has appeared before the Transport Committee, he has always been open to change and improvements. With that in mind, may I ask him to take into account the great future improvements that can be made from technology? The digital railway will add a third extra capacity without the need to build more track, but that will only occur if the unions and the workforce embrace change and do not use it as an opportunity to go on strike, as I have seen in the Southern network. Strikes have been the single biggest issue, not the other factors that hon. Members mention.

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is disappointing to see the RMT continuing to strike when none of its members face the loss of their jobs or a loss of money.

**Andy McDonald:** It is about safety.

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman talks about safety. This is a false approach. We know that the chief inspector of safety on our railways has said that the approach that is now taken on many parts of the network is safe. On Southern, where we had the initial problems, more staff are operating on trains now than before the dispute. So this is not about taking staff away from helping passengers; it is about making the railways run more efficiently. It is tragic that the Labour party does not seem to want that and all Labour Members can do is chime the same songs as their union paymasters.

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): As part of the rail review, will the Secretary of State look at cross-border rail services between Wales and England? They are overcrowded and unreliable now. There needs to be far better working with the Welsh Government on this, because demand in my constituency just grows and grows.

**Chris Grayling:** I absolutely accept that. The hon. Lady highlights one of the problems across the network. The new trains on the Great Western franchise that are coming as part of the Wales & Borders franchise will help. I am also focused with the CrossCountry franchise on making sure that, as we take this forward in the interim period we do not lose sight of the need to expand capacity. She makes a good point, but what she is experiencing is true across the whole network. It is why we have this big programme of train replacement, with longer trains, new trains and more space right across the network, funded by the train operating companies and the lease companies.

**Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Many of my constituents commute from Nuneaton to Birmingham or Leicester. That service has become so popular that there is a massive demand for new capacity. I hear what my right hon. Friend says about the CrossCountry franchise, and I will be grateful if he says today what that means in relation to the improvement in capacity that is so desperately needed for my constituents.

**Chris Grayling:** We are now looking at what we do with the CrossCountry franchise over the coming years, but I assure him that one part of that planning is dealing with overcrowding on the routes. There are too many parts of the CrossCountry network where the trains are just too full, and we have to address that, and we will.

**Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): I appreciate the Secretary of State's statement. I welcome a review of the railways, but if the Government are admitting that the railways are not working, they should freeze fares until the review reports and the changes are made. This certainly means cancelling the planned rises in January, particularly as my constituents who travel on Southern Rail and passengers across the country have had such a torrid time. Does the Secretary of State agree?

**Chris Grayling:** In those areas where people have had a torrid time we have provided a month's free travel. We did that on Southern during the worst days of the industrial dispute, because that delivers quicker and much more substantially money into the pocket of

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people who have suffered. That has been a good approach. It amounts, together with Delay Repay to almost 10% of the annual cost of travel for a season ticket holder, and it gets the money to people quicker.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's review and his statement today. Does he agree that it is critical that the review delivers not just vital improvements on lines such as the Cotswold line in my constituency but the improvements to reliability, stability and accountability that my rail-travelling constituents deserve?

**Chris Grayling:** I agree. The problem is that we now have a system that is fragmented but under intense capacity pressures. We need to have a railway that is more joined up, where lines of accountability are clearer and where the response to problems, which will always arise on a busy network, is much more joined up and quicker for passengers.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Welsh Government have recently awarded the new Wales franchise. He mentioned devolution in his statement. If lessons are to be learned from that far better, more customer and investment focused franchise, will the Williams review draw on them so that best practice can be shared between different franchises? It is important that we learn from devolution rather than simply criticise it all the time.

**Chris Grayling:** I do not criticise it all the time; I have done the biggest piece of devolution on the railways for a long time, with the creation of the Welsh Valleys line. I look forward with interest and hope that the new Welsh franchise will deliver something significantly better for passengers. Of course I am in favour of sharing best practice across the whole railway and the whole transport system.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): May I ask that, as part of the review, Network Rail is made to keep some of the promises that it has made. My right hon. Friend will know what I am going to say because I bang on about it every time I see him, but the Access for All bridge at Garforth was promised years ago now, and all I have had is excuses and misdirection and no idea where the money given by the former Chancellor, George Osborne, has gone. As part of the review will my right hon. Friend ensure that, when promises are made they are delivered to my constituents because it is frankly an utter embarrassment?

**Chris Grayling:** I understand my hon. Friend's frustration. A number of station projects did not make it in the control period that is about to end. We have funding for accessibility projects in the next control period, and I will certainly want to see those that are needed and have already been promised get prominence in the list of projects that we assemble to use that money.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): In his statement, the Secretary of State alluded to the utter chaos that we had seen in the north during the summer. Unfortunately, things have not improved measurably for my constituents.

Will he take this opportunity to tell us exactly what dialogue he is having with the managing director of TransPennine Express trains? I understand that he has just received a significant pay increase, which appears as if he is being rewarded for failure.

**Chris Grayling:** My officials and I are in conversations with those overseeing the railways in the north all the time. Clearly, there have been improvements. TransPennine Express had issues with the timetabling of Northern, which had a knock-on effect on its services. That situation has improved. There is further to go, but the hon. Lady's constituents will benefit from the arrival of new trains this autumn. One of the issues on TransPennine Express is capacity. More capacity will be coming on through. I am always happy to talk to her off line because I want to ensure that local problems are dealt with. She knows that she can always collar me in the Division Lobby—we are not always in the same Lobby, of course, but she is always welcome to grab me in the corridor if there are any particular issues.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): *Diolch yn fawr*, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Wales Governance Centre recently published figures that showed my country would have received an extra £5.6 billion since 1999 if the rate of infrastructure investment had kept pace with that of London and the south-east of England. Will the terms of reference for the review include how to ensure a more equitable share of investment so that Welsh taxpayers' money is no longer siphoned off to invest in infrastructure here in London and the south-east?

**Chris Grayling:** I do not think that the Welsh can ever claim that their money is siphoned off to pay for the rest of the country, given the amount of support from taxpayers elsewhere in the UK that goes into Wales, but we will be looking at all aspects of the industry, how we operate different parts of the infrastructure and ensuring that we do the right things for the whole of the UK.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): My constituents who use the Wharfedale and Harrogate Northern rail lines are still experiencing missed and late services and are still travelling on Pacer trains. I have met Northern a number of times. They have promised the new trains by December and no more Pacers by March, and that these problems will be alleviated. How will the new terms of reference ensure that those demands are met?

**Chris Grayling:** I was in Harrogate recently, talking to passengers at the station, and I know that the new trains have started to arrive on the line from Leeds north through Harrogate. I understand from my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) that he has had a number of letters from constituents praising the new trains and saying that it is a great new departure for the local railway. Of course it takes time for a new fleet of trains to arrive. The Pacer trains will be going, the sooner the better from my point of view, but the good news for people using that line is that they are one of the first in the north to get the new trains.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): If this is going to be a truly comprehensive review, will the Secretary of State look again at the ownership of stations,

especially those in Greater Manchester, where Transport for Greater Manchester made a strong case for better integrated services if it were able to take over ownership of the stations?

**Chris Grayling:** We will look at all aspects of devolution. The issue was that Transport for Greater Manchester wanted us to give the money for it to do the stations up, and then effectively we would pay it back out of rail revenues that would flow back through the franchise to the Government, as part of the subsidy we provide. It was not a compelling deal. Instead, I offered both money and the expertise of London and Continental Railways—the development arm of the Department for Transport—to help it maximise the potential of those stations, and that work is happening at the moment.

## Point of Order

12.59 pm

**Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab):** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This week, the UK Statistics Authority strongly rebuked the Department for Education for its use of statistics, including the now thoroughly discredited claim that its policies have led to 1.9 million more children being in good or outstanding schools. The Government were clearly advised to stop using that claim but, incredibly, the Prime Minister went on to reuse it at Prime Minister's questions—ironically, when being challenged by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition on the Government's misuse of statistics. Earlier today I challenged the Leader of the House, and she went on to repeat the same misleading statistic herself.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) raised this with Mr Speaker on Wednesday, he said that it is not his role to act as a truth commissioner, and neither is it yours, Madam Deputy Speaker. The UK Statistics Authority has already ruled on the truth of those statistics, so clearly I am not asking you to do that. However, I seek your guidance on the procedure when Ministers have inadvertently misled the House. Can you confirm that in such a case, it is incumbent on the Minister to correct the record? Can you tell us whether any Ministers have given you an indication of when they intend to do so?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order, and I appreciate fully the point she makes. I am glad that I do not have to argue the point that it is not for the Chair to decide on the veracity or otherwise of any statistic used in the Chamber. That is a blessing, because if it were the duty of the Chair, the Chair would have no time to do anything else. I also appreciate that the purpose of the hon. Lady's point of order is to draw to the attention of those in the Chamber and on the Treasury Bench the factual problem that she alleges, and I have every confidence that they have noted her points, which I hope means that she has achieved her objective.

## Victims Strategy

1.2 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Victims Strategy.

It is a pleasure to open today's debate on the victims strategy, which is of importance to Members on both sides of the House and to our constituents. Today's debate follows on from the launch of the first ever cross-Government victims strategy by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Justice and myself on 10 September. The strategy has been well received, and I want to take this opportunity to thank my officials; partners in the Crown Prosecution Service and the police, and especially police and crime commissioner Vera Baird; members of the victims' panel; Government colleagues, particularly the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), as well as my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), and my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General; groups who support victims; and particularly victims themselves, who have bravely shared their experiences and made a huge contribution to this strategy.

In that vein, I also want to thank the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero), for her constructive engagement. While we may differ on some details, and rightly in her role she may—and, I sense, will—challenge me on particular aspects, her sincere commitment to improve support for the victims of crime is evident and consistent.

The strategy reflects this Government's and this Prime Minister's clear commitment to better support the victims of crime, building on progress so far. Someone who is a victim of crime should not become a victim of the process that follows. Our legal and justice system is quite rightly admired around the world, but we must ensure that it continues to evolve, to reflect the evolving nature of crime and the needs of victims. Our vision is of a justice system that supports more victims to speak up with the certainty that they will be understood, protected and, above all else, supported, regardless of their circumstances or background.

I make no apology for the lengthy list of those whom I thanked and paid tribute to a few moments ago for their work in this area, because that list—I could have included many others—reflects the fact that the key to delivering our vision and what victims want and need lies in working together.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): The Minister is sensibly outlining the fact that this is a cross-departmental and, to a certain extent, cross-party issue. Will he also acknowledge the importance of rehabilitation of offenders and encourage his Department to ramp up its work in that regard? If there is greater rehabilitation, there will be fewer victims in the first place and fewer offenders reoffending.

**Edward Argar:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that he has taken a consistent interest in that issue both as a Member and in his distinguished legal career prior to being elected to this place. He is right that this strategy is about providing support for the victims of crime, but ideally we must continue to focus on reducing

the number of victims. This Government are very clear in the measures they are taking to reduce the number of victims of crime through tackling crime, but equally, as he says, rehabilitation is vital, because if we can prevent people from reoffending, we will see fewer victims of crime in the first place.

No single Department, agency, emergency service or other organisation alone can provide the services that victims rightly expect to receive, as shown by the response to major incidents and tragedies, such as the Grenfell fire and terrorist attacks in Manchester and London. Since my appointment four months ago, I have spoken to many victims and survivors, victims' groups and of course the excellent Victims' Commissioner, Baroness Newlove. I pay tribute to Baroness Newlove, who has played a huge role in moving this agenda forward since her appointment. She has taken a new role, shaped it, made it her own and achieved a huge amount, and we should all be grateful to her.

I also highlight the role of Members. It is difficult to single out particular ones, but I pay tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning), who held this role before me many years ago and started off a lot of this work. He is a tireless, vocal and fearless campaigner on these issues, and that should be recognised. I also recognise the work of those who work in the justice system.

Through visits I have undertaken to not just our custodial establishments but women's centres in the north-west, the Hackney youth offending team and youth courts, I have heard directly exactly how important the victim's experience is to ensure that justice is delivered and is seen and felt to be delivered. This strategy consolidates years of progress that have been made by Governments of both parties, from the introduction of the first code of practice for victims in 2006, to the appointment of the first Victims' Commissioner in 2010 and the 2012 publication of "Getting it right for victims and witnesses". There is a large amount of cross-party consensus on this agenda. That is to the good, and we might wish to see it more often in this House.

Crucially, we are seeking to ensure that we keep pace with the changing nature of crime and the crimes being reported and are better able to deal with the pressures placed on the system. Our criminal justice system must ensure that those who are innocent are acquitted and that those who are guilty are convicted, but it must also work to respect the interests of victims. Victims have told us that they want to be treated fairly, properly and with dignity. They want to have timely, accurate information and communication and to see a joined-up and effective system working for them and ensuring that their journey is as simple as possible. Members will see that the structure of the strategy is no coincidence. I was clear that its structure should reflect the journey of a victim through the criminal justice system, making it clear that we are seeking to place them at the heart of what we are trying to do with this strategy.

We have made significant progress, but recognise that more must and can be done. Through the strategy, we seek to make victims' entitlements a practical reality, rather than simply well intentioned words on a page. To that end, we have committed to strengthening the code of practice for victims—the victims code—to make sure that it keeps pace with the changing needs of victims and the nature of crime in the 21st century, while

making clear to agencies and victims the services they are expected to provide and receive. We will deliver on that commitment by updating and amending the victims code to address its complexity, accessibility and language, and updating the entitlements. We shall consult on the changes in early 2019.

We want to go further, so in our strategy we reaffirm our manifesto commitment to develop proposals and to consult on the detail of a victims law. We will consider strengthening the enforcement of the victims code to ensure that victims receive the services to which they are entitled and, if they do not, better to hold criminal justice agencies to account; strengthening the powers of the Victims, Commissioner, so that that role has a stronger voice for victims and is better able to hold Government to account; and strengthening the role such legislation can play to underpin the consistency and enforceability of standards and the code. I pay tribute to Baroness Brinton, who is already engaged in that work, and to the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) for his work both in his previous role and in this House. We may not always agree on all the details of his proposals, but I look forward with pleasure to continuing to engage with him, as we develop the legislative proposals in the coming months.

In considering the changing nature of crime and victims' needs, it is right that we address compensation. Although no amount of money can make up for the immense suffering endured by victims of violent crime, it is vital that they receive the help and support they need to rebuild their lives. In the victims strategy, we announced our intention to undertake a full review of the criminal injuries compensation scheme to ensure that it reflects fully the changing nature of crime and that every victim gets the compensation to which they are entitled.

**James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): Will my hon. Friend ensure not only that a compensation scheme reflects the pain and suffering victims have gone through, but that it is pacy and timely? Often, the issue is when the compensation comes through, not just how much it is.

**Edward Argar**: My hon. Friend is right. In many aspects of the treatment of victims by the system, timeliness is hugely important. Although the operation of the scheme is a matter for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, his points about timeliness and pace are well made and noted.

It is important that the review looks not only at the concerns regarding the eligibility rules of the scheme, but at its sustainability, the affordability of any changes to be made and the rules on the timescales for applications. It will also enable the Government to take account of recommendations made by the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, which is investigating compensation and redress for victims of child sexual abuse. The review is expected to report in 2019 with recommendations for reform.

We have also announced our intention to remove the pre-1979 "same roof rule" from the scheme. We recognise that the rule has unfairly denied compensation for some victims of violence and abuse, who lived with their attacker as members of the same family, and we are committed to abolishing it as quickly as possible. I look forward to introducing proposals in the coming months.

I take this opportunity to pay specific tribute to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). Not only is she an honourable and diligent Member, but she is a brave and dedicated campaigner and a very decent lady. She has cause to be very proud of her work on this issue, as do her constituents.

Alongside the victims strategy and reflecting commitments in it, we have also launched a consultation on establishing an independent public advocate to support those who have been bereaved in public disasters through subsequent inquests and inquiries. Losing a loved one in any circumstances is always deeply distressing, but those who have been bereaved in a public disaster have the additional challenge of navigating the complex and often lengthy investigations into what happened, alongside many other families all struggling to get access to information and to make their voices heard. During this time, as happened to the families bereaved in the Hillsborough stadium disaster, the voices of the bereaved can be lost to the very people responsible for uncovering the truth. We are committed to ensuring that the experiences of the Hillsborough families are not repeated and that the concerns and views of the bereaved are heard. It is the right thing to do.

The independent public advocate will help bereaved families to engage effectively with investigations. They will ensure that bereaved families understand what is happening and why; that they can participate in these investigations, when there is the opportunity to do so; and that those undertaking the investigations understand the views of the bereaved and are able to answer any questions they have. The independent public advocate will help to ensure that the voices of the bereaved are heard. Our consultation, which runs until 3 December, explores the role of the independent public advocate in greater detail, seeking views on when the support will be available, what investigations the role will cover and who will be eligible for support. I wholeheartedly encourage Members to contribute their views to that consultation.

We recognise that support can be fragmented and difficult to navigate and that victims often do not know what is available or where to find help. For many, the experience of being a victim does not stop after a crime has been committed. We are committed to ensuring that victims receive quality support when and where they need it. We are working across Government to develop seamless support for all victims of crime through better agency co-operation and more devolution to police and crime commissioners. In that context, I am particularly pleased with the work being led by Assistant Chief Constable Emma Barnett, who is pulling together cross-agency working groups to make sure that that work is driven forward at pace across all agencies.

In the past, the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ashfield, has rightly raised questions about funding. The strategy is for all victims and outlines additional funding of approximately £37 million that is provided for those who report crime and those who, for whatever reason, do not or cannot. It also sets out our plans to bring Government and agency spending on supporting victims—roughly £200 million a year—together for the first time, to improve co-ordination. To do this, we will develop a new delivery model for support services, which will allow us better to co-ordinate and combine funding, in order to increase its impact. There are new services and additional funding, but we also plan to

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make existing money work better, with our focus less on inputs than on outputs for victims, so that we can improve support and ensure that the money goes to the right people, in the right place at the right time.

As part of the additional funding, we have committed to increasing spending from £31 million to £39 million on improving services for survivors of sexual violence and abuse who seek support from sexual assault centres. We will bring in new funding for advocacy for those affected by domestic homicide, and we are improving the support for families bereaved by murder and manslaughter by replacing current funding arrangements, allowing them access to the widest range of support, based on their needs. We have further committed to improving support for victims of sexual violence. From April 2019, we will award grant funding to rape support services for two years, rather than for one as we do now, offering more stability and certainty to those essential support providers. We will also explore the benefits of full local commissioning of sexual violence support services with police and crime commissioners, who we believe have a key role in responding to the needs of victims in their local area.

We are spending £8 million on interventions to make sure that the right support is available for children who witness domestic abuse. For some children, that trauma can lead to internalisation and normalisation of abuse, and perhaps to repetition. We must do all we can to break the cycle and to end this abhorrent crime.

We will ensure a criminal justice system in which perpetrators are brought to justice, and that intervenes to protect victims before abuse escalates.

We are acutely aware of the importance of listening to and understanding victims' experiences of domestic abuse, and that is why the Government recently held a consultation on transforming our response to such experiences. We will publish our response later this year, and introduce legislation through the domestic abuse Bill. I am pleased to see sitting beside me the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle. She is my opposite number in the Home Office and is doing amazing work driving forward this agenda. I work closely with her on this issue, along with the Solicitor General.

Victims need support and information so that they remain confident and engaged, and so that they have the tools they need fully to understand and challenge decisions in the justice system. We will improve support after a crime has been reported by introducing better police training on conducting interviews and collecting evidence, and we will trial body-worn cameras to assist in taking victims' personal statements. That will give greater choice in how victims are heard and reduce the need for statements to be repeated multiple times to multiple people, which involves the added trauma of having to relive the experience once again.

We are committed to increasing the number of intermediaries by a quarter, so that there are more experts to assist victims and witnesses in communicating evidence to the police and courts. Furthermore, we will improve communication with victims by clearly explaining decisions not to prosecute, and the right for them to review Crown Prosecution Service decisions. We reiterate

our clear support for the unduly lenient sentence scheme, which is led by my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General.

We fully recognise that for some, going to court can be daunting and criminal trials can be complex. We want to minimise the impact on victims of attending court by improving the support available, and responding to their practical needs. We will deliver that by launching new guidance and a toolkit for prosecutors and therapists, to encourage the take-up of pre-trial therapy. We will improve the court environment with new victim-friendly waiting areas, and continue to develop the use of video links that allow vulnerable victims to give evidence away from the defendant and courtroom.

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): I know the Government have been trying to roll out video links for a while, but one kickback comes because courts do not have the funds to get the equipment. Will the Minister address that?

**Edward Argar:** We are developing the video link scheme, and one key factor of its development is to ensure that the technology is robust and does the job. That is why we are taking our time to ensure that we get this right and that prosecutors, defendants and judges have confidence in that technology. The scheme will be rolled out to more courts in fairly short order, but the real factor behind the time we are taking is to ensure that we get it right and that trials continue to be robust.

We will expand support for families who have been bereaved by gang violence. The recent spate of gang-related violence, especially in London, has shone a light on the devastation that knife and gun crime can reap on families and communities. Alongside the strong lead taken by the Home Secretary in bringing forward measures to tackle the issue at source, we will introduce new funding for those affected by homicide.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he is doing on behalf of victims, but may I take him back to the court process? For many victims, the act of sentencing gives them justice, yet in far too many cases the feeling is that the defendant has the upper hand due to the menace that they can display during sentencing or their ability not to attend sentencing and stay in the cells. Has the Minister undertaken any work to find out how such things can be minimised so that defendants do not behave in such a manner?

**Edward Argar:** My hon. Friend is right, and at all stages of the process it is important to minimise additional distress to victims. I understand that judges, quite rightly, control and manage their own court rooms, and they have the power—if they believe it appropriate—to proceed without the defendant being present. That is a matter of judicial discretion, and I have confidence that our world-class judiciary will exercise that discretion appropriately.

Finally, I turn to parole. Earlier this year the Worboys case brought into focus the need for improvements to be made to the way that victims are communicated with and their cases handled. We want to ensure that the system is as transparent as possible, and that victims



have a voice in the process. That is why this strategy sets out our plans to reform and simplify the victim contact scheme, to make it easier for victims to opt-in, and to introduce more frequent and better quality communication. We will also improve victim liaison officer training, especially in supporting victims during parole hearings and with the presumption that a victim's personal statement can be made to the Parole Board if the victim wishes it.

In April the Secretary of State published the "Review of the law, policy and procedure relating to Parole Board decisions." We have further consulted on the detail for parole decisions to be reconsidered in certain circumstances, and are carefully considering all responses to that review before setting out our next steps later this year. Those steps can, and should, help to ensure that past failings cannot be repeated.

I believe that this strategy is a reflection of how we should seek to see ourselves: as a nation that offers dignity, empathy and compassion to people when they are at their most vulnerable. There is a broad consensus on that across the House, and alongside the vigorous action taken by this Government to reduce crime and the number of victims of crime, this strategy will help to ensure that when someone becomes a victim of crime, the support they need is there. We have already begun to implement that strategy, and I look forward to its delivering on this Government's, and my personal, commitment to the victims of crime.

1.26 pm

**Gloria De Piero** (Ashfield) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his kind words, his tone, and the commitment to victims that he demonstrated in his speech. There is, of course, much to welcome, and although I know he is relatively new to this role, I will raise once again the deep frustration that I feel, because it is years since the Government first promised that they would enshrine key entitlements for victims and witnesses in primary legislation. These measures are welcome, but it seems a little late to be still saying "consultation, consultation, consultation." I suppose victims will have to wait a little longer for their rights to be taken seriously, and for some of the positive measures mentioned to be guaranteed by law.

Rights in the current victims code are not sufficiently enforceable, and without the power to enforce that code in law, it is left to the police, prosecutors, courts and the Parole Board to monitor how well they comply and to mark their own homework. Well-meaning but underfunded service providers are creaking under the weight of Government cuts, and unscrupulous practitioners are still able to leave victims without their rights or any come back.

As I have been saying for months, the only thing that will do is legislation. The Victims' Commissioner, whom the Minister rightly praises, has called for a victims law, and for seismic change in the culture of the justice system. Victim Support has demanded legislation, along with a raft of other campaigners. The Government now say that they will consult on a revised victims code in 2019—nearly half a decade after they first promised to provide a victims law—and on the detail of victim-focused legislation. Can the Minister say what part of victims' rights would not require legal status? Why not make the entire code law, along with any welcome and necessary additions?

I was dismayed, although not entirely surprised that, after I submitted various written questions—I think this was before the Minister's tenure—I discovered that the Government do not collect data on the experiences of victims in the criminal justice system, or on how the code is being implemented. They could not tell me how many breaches of the victims code there have been in the past 12 years, how long it takes for victims to receive any compensation they have been awarded, or how many victims of domestic violence have been cross-examined in court by the perpetrator—the list goes on. The Government simply do not monitor whether the code, which they admit is known about by only a fraction of victims, is having any effect. Will the Government commit to act by looking at how this is or is not working, now and after any legislation is passed? Can the Minister tell me the answer to any of those questions today? Will his Department commit to annual reporting on the state of victims' rights?

It is also disappointing that some fundamental issues that victims and campaigners have been shouting about from the rooftops are not addressed in the strategy. Why are there no measures to stop the barbaric process of allowing victims of rape to be cross-examined in a way that is designed to undermine their credibility? We have seen instances of rape survivors being grilled by their previous partners about their underwear and even about owning sex toys in an attempt to undermine their credibility and to show that their sexual history meant they were surely consenting to their rapist.

Meticulous research from Dame Vera Baird QC, the former Solicitor General, and the Northumbria police and crime commissioner, to whom the Minister referred found that rape complainants' previous sexual history was used as evidence in 37% of the trials she studied. In the majority of those cases, the evidence used related to the women's sexual activity with men other than the defendant. In almost two thirds of the cases where previous sexual history was used in evidence, the proper procedure to apply for the judge's consent ahead of trial with notice to the prosecution was not followed. There was either no application or it was made at trial without notice. In one trial, the defence barrister said that his line of questioning was to show that "she is an adulteress". Surely the Government can see that that is outrageous—we are living in 2018—especially after so much progress has been made by the Me Too movement.

**Sarah Champion:** I am sure that my hon. Friend is also aware and deeply shocked that in cases of child sexual exploitation, children are disproportionately asked about their past sexual behaviour, which then goes out in front of the court. Surely that must be stopped.

**Gloria De Piero:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and let me take this opportunity to commend her for her rigorous and unstoppable campaigning work. That is a very good point, which, if we are having a consultation, should be included in it.

The Victims' Commissioner for London rightly said that this process re-traumatises victims. It causes them irreparable harm and prevents other victims from coming forward, yet we see nothing about that in the strategy.

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful point. Half of all clinical commissioning groups have plans to reduce their spending

[Stephanie Peacock]

on mental health. Does she agree that this will have a significant impact on survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, for whom mental health services are so important in helping them to recover from trauma?

**Gloria De Piero:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. Yesterday was World Mental Health Day. For anyone—there may be people in this House who have suffered the trauma we are discussing—to have to go through that trauma without the mental health support one would inevitably need is shocking.

A victims law presents a unique opportunity to protect rape victims from the ordeal of having their sexual history dragged through the courts. Does the Minister deny there is a problem, or will he, at the very least, commit to including this issue in the forthcoming consultation?

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) mentioned mental health. The strategy makes little mention of the mental health trauma most victims experience after their ordeal and the long-lasting effects it has on their lives. One third of forensic physicians who support victims after a sexual assault say accessibility to mental health provision is poor, so they cannot always refer victims to the help they desperately need. The Victims' Commissioner for London talks about rape and sexual violence victims who have been left unsupported on waiting lists for six months or more after unimaginable trauma. The Government need to guarantee victims' decent mental health provision by law and fund it adequately, not as a Cinderella service. Can the Minister give me some reassurance on that today?

The Conservative party claims that austerity is over. Can the Minister confirm that a number of spending pledges in the victims strategy, on which I have sought clarification through written questions, such as the £18.8 million for domestic abuse accommodation services and £8 million to support children who witness domestic abuse, are not in fact additional funding commitments but money shifted from elsewhere in existing budgets? Will he tell us which other areas and services will lose out as a result?

What about the personal finances of victims? I recently had a harrowing conversation with a woman whose husband was given a 16-year sentence for her attempted murder. She is now having to pay enormous legal fees to divorce him, knowing that he is likely to be entitled to some of her money, her pension and her home. Where is the justice in that? When two women a week are murdered by a partner, this is no small problem. This absurd situation cannot be allowed to continue. The presumption must be that there is a loss of financial entitlement, enforced by law, in all but the most exceptional cases of murder or attempted murder of a spouse. Will the Minister commit to legislation that strips attempted murderers of their spousal rights, which they surely forfeited when inflicting such brutal damage on their partner? I hope Government Ministers will work with us to amend the law and ensure that this obvious injustice is ended.

Other victims who feel that perpetrators have got off far too lightly include the families of people killed on our roads. In 2014, 25-year-old Joseph Brown-Lartey

was tragically killed in Rochdale by a reckless motorist driving at 80 miles per hour in a 30 miles per hour speed limit zone. The offender was sentenced to six years in jail and was released after just three. The family of this young person with so much to live for are rightly furious that this driver can walk free while they are left to grieve. It is almost a year to the day since the Government committed to increasing the maximum sentence for causing death by dangerous driving, yet the families of those killed are still waiting for changes. Will the Government tell us when we can expect those increases to come forward?

There is no Government commitment to introducing an independent violence advocate to support victims as they recover and seek justice. Victims should not have to navigate an extremely complex system alone. Will the Minister agree with me and the Victims' Commissioner for London, and commit to that in the new strategy?

As the Victims' Commissioner, Baroness Newlove, has said, victims should not have to fight their own corner. This strategy, although it does contain positive measures, leaves far too much to be desired for victims, who will still feel on their own under this Government. It is time for real action by passing a proper victims law.

1.36 pm

**Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con):** Crime is significantly lower than it was in the mid-1990s, but there has been a change in the pattern and the nature of it. The increases in crime have been in what many people would regard as the more serious types of crime, particularly violent crimes. Much of our criminal justice system is understandably and rightly focused on the perpetrators of crime: on how we can prevent people from being drawn into a life of crime by tackling some of the root causes that make them more susceptible to it, or, on the penal side of the criminal justice system, in dealing with sentencing, public protection and making sure that those people cannot cause serious damage. We need to make sure that that is not done at the expense of neglecting those who suffer most directly from such crimes: the direct victims of crime.

Many of the changes in the pattern and nature of crime in our communities have consequences for the experience of victims. We need to ensure that how the Government and society treat and support our victims through the process changes to reflect their own changing experiences. In my constituency, over the past year we have seen over 1,500 violent crimes recorded. Worryingly, that is a massive 30% increase on the previous year. Each of those violent crimes clearly has a direct victim, many of whom will need support. All will need consideration of how the criminal justice system proceeds in dealing with the compilation of evidence, prosecution, and, where appropriate, conviction and punishment of those responsible for those crimes.

As my hon. Friend the Minister said, huge progress has been made in recent years. When I was studying law in the mid-1990s, victims were, if anything, an afterthought in the whole system. When I was training for the Bar, the way that barristers and legal representatives were to approach victims was not even covered in the vocational training. The whole system seemed to assume that victims were little more than onlookers, with no more stake in proceedings than any other member of society.

I certainly welcome the enormous progress that has been made, particularly over the past 12 years, starting with the introduction of the victims code. It is right that we pay tribute to the work done by previous Governments to introduce the Victims' Commissioner, who has done some extremely important work to ensure that victims' interests are considered within Government and more widely. More recently, police and crime commissioners up and down the country have put the rights and interests of victims at the heart of their work, ensuring that they are a priority in local policing. The best PCCs ensure that is a key part of their focus, beyond what most people probably associate with their core work.

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend, but I am also concerned that the number of victims applying to civil courts to try to get non-molestation orders against abusive partners or ex-partners seems to be on the increase. I hope that we will be taking action to try to stop that, because sometimes it costs people up to £10,000 to get an ex-partner off their back.

**Mike Wood:** I am sure that the Minister will respond to my hon. Friend's point, which I agree with. Of course, some of the legislation going through the House is relevant to that point, whether the legislation relating to the Government's domestic violence strategy or private Members' Bills, such as the Stalking Protection Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). They will allow the criminal justice system to ensure that perpetrators are stopped before their crimes, which are directed largely at women but also at men, escalate to something more serious.

Although much progress has been made in recent years—and we all recognise that the £200 million being spent on supporting victims is a considerable amount of money—I am sure that we all have examples from our constituencies of victims being let down by the system. One of the most upsetting cases that I have dealt with recently involved a young woman in my constituency. The charges for the crimes that she was the victim of covered a range of serious offences, including sexual offences and false imprisonment. Her statement included evidence of very coercive behaviour, domestic violence and assault. Yet her experience of our criminal justice system was simply not good enough.

After an arrest was made, the communication from the police was certainly not good enough, but it got worse as the cases progressed. At the initial bail hearing there was little or no communication from the police or the Crown Prosecution Service. The family understand that the CPS did not contest the bail hearing, despite the very serious offences involved, but they still do not understand how or why that decision was made. The suspect was released on bail and continued to live in the local area. Although bail conditions were of course imposed, the police offered no reassurances on how the victim could be protected pending trial.

The accused was re-arrested after an incident and an application was made to vary the bail conditions, but that hearing was missed because, as far as we can ascertain, they were taken to the wrong court on the day of the hearing after a weekend in a police cell. Having missed the hearing, the accused was re-released on the

existing bail conditions. We can only imagine how that affected the victim and her family. It is simply not good enough.

Perhaps more worryingly, the victim and her family have constantly been told that it would be better if she did not have any counselling, therapy or help to deal with these traumatic experiences until the trial concluded, in case it influenced the evidence. A victim may have to wait 15 or 18 months before the case comes to trial, and all that time without proper support is extremely damaging. Even with the best psychiatric support, therapy and counselling, and any other services that the state, the third sector or anyone else can offer, it is difficult to see how that damage could be repaired at a later stage.

**Sarah Champion:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point about the suggestion that victims should not have counselling before going to court. I have heard about that a lot recently, from both the police and the CPS. Is that something the Minister could look into, because there are appropriate types of counselling that would not disrupt people's recollection, and they are being denied that support?

**Mike Wood:** I hope that can be considered. Clearly nobody wants to endanger a fair trial, or to give another reason to cast doubt on credible evidence. The circumstances of a lot of domestic violence and serious sexual offences mean that the evidence available is often not as concrete as it might be for other types of crime. We really do need to ensure that victims receive both the service they deserve and the support they so desperately need. This strategy is an important first step in making sure that is the case. I have referred to only one example from my constituency, although it is a particularly distressing one, but I am sure that there are very few Members, if any, who have not encountered something similar in their own constituency casework.

I welcome the strategy that the Minister introduced today, and particularly the plans for a victims Bill. It is so important that we look to place on a statutory footing the strengthening of those rights already provided in the code and of the powers that the Victims' Commissioner has to ensure that victims' rights are protected within Government and outside, to ensure that victims and their families have access to information—the right to be informed—and the right to be properly involved. Clearly, this does need to be done on a cross-Government basis, as it does not all fall within a single Department.

The crime survey of England and Wales suggests that one fifth of adults will be the victims of crime this year in some form. The strategy is an important step in making sure that those victims who have already suffered from crime are not made to suffer again through the process that follows that crime.

1.51 pm

**Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood), and I, too, am pleased that we are discussing this extremely important issue today. I welcome the degree of consensus forming around placing victims at the heart of justice, although it is to be regretted that it has taken so long for the Government to publish this strategy. I also welcome the Government's

[Gavin Newlands]

approach in looking to that great beacon of good governance in Edinburgh, as confirmed last month by the Minister, who said that

“in drawing up this strategy we have taken great heed of what is done in Scotland and looked at what the Scottish Government do. There is no reason to be dogmatic about these things. Where there is good practice elsewhere that may be applicable, we are always happy to look at it, and my officials have been looking at what is done in Scotland.”—[*Official Report*, 10 September 2018; Vol. 646, c. 482.]

He was right to do so—Scottish legislation has already created strong rights and protections for victims that cover many of the issues now in the Government’s victims strategy. For example, the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 has improved the support and information that is available to victims, and I point to the Scottish Government’s victims code for Scotland, published in 2016, which clearly sets out the rights of victims in one place. The code ensures that justice agencies, including the police, the Crown, the courts, and the Parole Board publish and report on shared standards regarding how victims are supported and how those standards are being met.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Gwent is a very good police force in south Wales. Nevertheless, every so often, I hear genuine concerns from victims about how their cases are being taken forward. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that better data on the experiences of victims in the justice system would be a real help?

**Gavin Newlands:** I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. The Scottish justice system, and its treatment of victims in the process, is not a land of milk and honey. It has its problems, and we could also do with better information on how victims experience the process. As a member of the Justice Committee, it is something that I will bring up. In fact, I asked a similar question at yesterday’s Committee hearing.

As I have just suggested, I am not standing here today to tell the House that the Scottish justice system or support for victims is perfect. I recently had a case in which a victim’s family felt let down by the Scottish system. My constituent had to wait five months to bury a loved one because of the time it took to find and charge a suspect. In Scotland, police often hold bodies for extended periods as both concerned families and the accused are entitled to have their own post-mortems performed, so stressful delays occur when no arrest has been made. In England and Wales, if no arrest has been made in 28 days, an independent post-mortem is commissioned. This is an area of the Scottish justice system that we need to address, and perhaps look south of the border for a solution, to make what must be an already incredibly difficult and traumatic time for those affected a little easier.

As I have said, I serve on the Justice Committee under the wise leadership of the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), and we hear week in and week out of the problems right through the justice system in England and Wales, from a lack of resources to a lack of judges and courts, poor victim support, not enough lawyers in parts of the country, legal aid policy, prison overcrowding and conditions, not enough prison officers, a failing rehabilitation system—the list is seemingly endless. Week in and week out,

many of the witnesses before us state that they would like the Ministry of Justice to replicate what happens in Scotland in many areas. Just yesterday, the Committee heard another extremely well qualified panel, including Professor Nick Hardwick, formerly the chair of the Parole Board and chief inspector of prisons, Dee Anand of the British Psychological Society and Mark Day of the Prison Reform Trust, all praise the approach Scotland has taken to a presumption against short sentences and on rehabilitation, which has resulted in the lowest recidivism rate in decades.

The team at the MOJ is relatively new—barring of course the Solicitor General, a welcome beacon of consistency in the Department. I welcome the fact the new team appears to be heading in a more progressive direction: whether through actually pursuing evidence-based policy or financial necessity, it is hard to say. In any case, I welcome that approach and the willingness to look at ideas from elsewhere.

As always, the SNP continually strives to build the fairest justice system possible. That is why the Scottish Government will build on our existing legislation and funding to ensure that victims are put at the centre of the justice process. Their voices will be heard and recognised. In 2018-19, the Scottish Government are providing £17.9 million to third sector organisations who work to support victims. In addition, they have announced a new three-year funding package for Victim Support Scotland, totalling £13.8 million, part of which will provide for a new homicide service giving families of murder victims access to a dedicated caseworker and continuous support. Often victims, and their families, can feel like they are being passed from one organisation to another, adding to their trauma when they are most vulnerable. This new funding is aimed at ensuring that Victim Support Scotland works in partnership with criminal justice and victim support bodies to develop a new approach. Along with the homicide service, it will ease the journey for victims and their families, whether or not they engage with the criminal justice process.

That approach has been welcomed by Victim Support Scotland, whose chief executive, Kate Wallace, said:

“We’re delighted with the shift to three-year funding which provides us with greater long-term stability to enhance the front-line support we provide for people affected by crime. The creation of the Homicide Service and the victim-centred approach are also very positive new developments and we will be working closely with all our partners to make these a reality.”

Crucially, it has the support of victims’ rights campaigners themselves, including Bea Jones, founder of the Moira Fund and the mother of Moira Jones who was murdered in Queens park, Glasgow in 2008. Bea has campaigned for greater support in Scotland for families bereaved through murder, and she said:

“This is an important step and one which will have a positive impact on many lives in Scotland. It will ensure more families will be helped than before, and that those families will get the right support, at the right time and from the right people. I’m pleased that in Moira’s name her charity has played a part in bringing about today’s news and that it enriches her legacy.”

I could not agree more.

The latest Scottish programme for government commits to helping victims in a number of other ways, too. It seeks to work with partners to reduce, and eliminate where possible, the need for victims to have to retell their story to different organisations as they look for

help. It seeks to widen the range of serious crimes where the victim can make a statement to court about how the crime has affected them, and it will ensure that victims and their families have better information and greater support ahead of prison release arrangements. It will also seek to improve the experience in the justice system of victims of rape and sexual assault.

Further, just four days ago, Scotland's relatively new Justice Secretary, Humza Yousaf, announced that he would chair a new victims taskforce that will be dedicated to improving victims' experiences of the justice system. This will ensure that victims' voices are heard and will streamline their journey through the criminal justice system. It will also provide wide-ranging support and will ensure access to support and information through the process. The task force will hear evidence directly from victims, and membership will include senior decision makers from justice agencies and voluntary partners, including those who represent victims. This is yet more evidence of the Scottish Government leading the way in their justice policy.

Earlier, I welcomed the fact that the UK had looked for inspiration from the excellent work of the SNP Scottish Government, but we, too, look elsewhere for best practice, whether to Iceland for the Barnahus concept—which involves immediate trauma-informed multi-agency support for child victims of serious crimes and the investigation of abuse, bringing together all relevant services under one roof—or to New Zealand, with its ground-breaking domestic abuse paid leave. Just a few days ago, at its conference, the SNP passed a motion calling on the UK Government to give victims of domestic abuse the right to paid leave from work to secure safe accommodation.

As we all know, domestic abuse can have a horrific and long-lasting impact on survivors and their children and a hugely detrimental impact on their jobs and career prospects. On both sides of the border, it is vital that we do everything we can to help the victims of abuse. Across the UK, more than 100,000 people are at high risk of being murdered or seriously injured as a result of domestic abuse. We must ensure that there is an awareness of what help is available to those at risk, as, on average, those at high risk often wait more than two and a half years before getting help.

As a constituency Member and as a White Ribbon Ambassador, I recently attended an extremely useful and enlightening training session with Renfrewshire's multi-agency risk assessment conference—MARAC—to learn about the support that it provides for victims. It works with multiple agencies to provide effective one-to-one support, advice and advocacy throughout their experience. That is an extremely difficult task in a sensitive area, but Renfrewshire MARAC is leading the way supporting victims, 95% of whom are women. It has been particularly successful, having heard 315 cases to date. In its observation audit, SafeLives Scotland found it to be the most effective MARAC in Scotland.

Renfrewshire MARAC is currently engaging in sensitive training. It has conducted 250 sensitive routine inquiry training sessions, including high-risk identification, for health visitors, family nurses, community mental health nurses, psychiatrists and psychologists and partners in addiction services. That work is essential to making the process of identifying abuse as easy as possible for the victim. It will also deliver domestic abuse awareness

training to 66 housing officers, including homeless services staff, which dovetails well with the commitment made by the Scottish Government to train all front-line police officers and the domestic abuse legislation that has recently been passed in Holyrood. I encourage those who wish to promote that kind of victim support to speak to Maxine and her MARAC team to learn about and apply as much as they can.

I listened carefully to the Minister's speech, and I echo every point that he made about domestic abuse. I look forward to the new Bill, but I urge him and his colleagues to ensure that the proper resources are provided to support its aspirations and ensure that more support is given to those who suffer such abuse.

As I think I have made clear, Scotland is leading the way in putting victims at the heart of the justice system. It is of paramount importance that victims of any crime are supported on every step of the way through the system and that the number of occasions on which they must relive their trauma is minimised as much as possible. The Scottish Government will always seek to learn from best practice across the world, and I hope that the UK Government will commit themselves to doing the same, whether from Scotland or the other side of the world. They owe it to victims and their families and friends to do just that.

2.3 pm

**Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): Let me begin by echoing what has been said by Members, including my hon. Friend the Minister, about the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and the amazing work that she has done. She is championing her constituents, as her name suggests, and it is important that she does not become a victim in any sense. There should be no witch hunt surrounding any of us who do our jobs and champion our constituents.

I welcomed what the Minister said in introducing the victims strategy, which is an important piece of the jigsaw that includes the need to reduce crime overall, to secure justice for victims and to reassure people and make them feel safe. The serious violence strategy, the Offensive Weapons Bill, the forthcoming domestic abuse Bill and this victims strategy should be all of a piece rather than working in isolation.

If the Minister wants any advice on how to roll out the strategy and make it a really meaningful document, he could do worse than come down to the Churchill Room at 7 o'clock this evening. Coincidentally, a couple of my constituents, Ray and Vi Donovan, will be attending a dinner there. They run the Chris Donovan Trust. What happened to them was this. Chris was walking along the street with his brother one day. He was beaten up, left to die, run over and dragged by a car—murdered, 16 years ago.

Ray and Vi, who naturally experienced a lot of anger and horror at losing their child, have turned that horror, that anger and frustration, into an incredible charity. They actually met the perpetrators who served their sentence, and they now go out into prisons and schools and work on restorative justice. They realise that victims are not just the people who have lost loved ones, and that any serious crime such as murder creates any number of victims because people's lives are written off.

[Paul Scully]

Ray and Vi also work with other charities. Along with the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), who is in the Chamber, I attended an awards ceremony that they hosted recently. They present awards to other small charities, typically run by the families of other victims of serious crime who have been murdered. They have taken that negative energy and turned it into something really positive to prevent people from going down the same path and creating more victims. One of the people to whom they awarded a prize was the Victims' Commissioner for London, Claire Waxman, who had suffered a horrendous amount of abuse from a long-term stalker.

I have often spoken about domestic abuse in this place, and I am glad that the subject has arisen now. We must go further in ensuring that we support domestic abuse victims fully. A family member has gone through some harrowing times over the last few years because of her controlling, coercive partner. Fortunately, she did not have to be cross-examined, but that is not always the case, despite the Government's best efforts. I know that many courts are working to try to separate entrances—certainly in the criminal courts people cannot be cross-examined by the alleged perpetrator, but in the family courts they can. Organisations such as Women's Aid have given many examples of that.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's constituent has been affected by the fact that universal credit payments are made to only one member of the household, but that can make the position even worse for families in which domestic abuse is an issue. He might like to have a word with the Secretary of State, who does not seem to want to introduce split payments to this flawed process.

**Paul Scully:** I do not think that that applies in the case that I have mentioned, but the hon. Lady has made a very interesting point.

We need to do more to ensure that victims cannot be questioned by perpetrators, which, effectively, extends suffering for many years.

There have been more than 100 victims in London this year. We have seen victim after victim portrayed in photographs in the *Evening Standard*. That senseless loss of life is often, but not solely, a result of gang activities. It is important to remember these victims' names, from Kyall Parnell, who was only 17 and who was stabbed in Tulse Hill on New Year's Eve, to Sandra Zmijan, whose body was found in a back garden in west London only about three weeks ago, on 24 September.

Just this week I was walking through Victoria station on my way to Westminster, as I usually do on my daily commute, and saw members of the Metropolitan police and some family members and activists handing out leaflets and posters. They wanted to find one of the most wanted people, Shane O'Brien. He murdered someone three years ago, and we must not forget his victim's name: Josh Hanson, who was murdered in Eastcote in Hillingdon three years ago. They are trying to find Shane O'Brien and bring him to justice, so that Josh Hanson's family, who are victims as well, can have some justice. If anybody can help, the incident room can be

reached on 0208 785 8099, or people can report via Crimestoppers. We need to look at all these things as part of a holistic solution in London and across the country.

That wider solution includes ensuring we can protect our police on the street. I am working closely, as our party's vice-chairman for London, with Shaun Bailey, who is talking about putting 1,000 more police on the street, using lessons from New York, which is utilising artificial intelligence and technology to release police from certain activities and on to the frontline. But this is not just about money, although that is important—I know every London MP of every political hue calls for extra resource for the Met police; it is also about how that money is spent. The Met police have £110 million from Government—from the precept, and therefore from the Mayor as well. So this has come from right across the board: the Mayor has the money, and he has given it to the Met police, and now we have to make sure that they can use it effectively to recruit the policemen we need.

We must move on from that consideration, too, because by the time someone has a knife in their hand and a policeman has found them, it is too late. We need to reach these people far earlier—not at secondary school, but at primary school.

The victims strategy fits in well in the London knife crime context not just through the ability to give someone who has been a victim and is a member of a gang the emotional support they need, but by having a way of removing them from the situation that would allow them to enter into gang retribution, so that we can break the cycle. The victims strategy can be used as a method of breaking the cycle, too.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I thank my near constituency neighbour for giving way, and he is right: he and I have attended many events to commemorate the work done by Ray and Vi Donovan. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that restorative justice must be part of a holistic solution for victims? Even in very serious cases, for instance involving people who have been assaulted, some victims find that restorative justice can contribute and help them even if they have been badly affected by a crime.

**Paul Scully:** The right hon. Gentleman is right. I have no idea how Ray and Vi Donovan had the chutzpah and courage to meet the people who murdered their son. They have such an inner strength, and they still exude that to this day; people can see that every time they meet them. The right hon. Gentleman is right that to understand can bring some sense of closure and sense that justice can be served in full, so that a victim's family and friends can move on with their lives as well.

The victims code is already in place, but research for the strategy found that people do not know that the code is there; only 18% of victims understand that it exists, so often they do not know what support is available for them. The strategy talks about the fact that the utmost respect should be afforded to victims and so forth. These are basic requirements, frankly, that we would expect everybody to already appreciate. None the less it cannot be said loudly enough that there is a strategy. Too often in any area of government these

considerations can be lost in bureaucracy and we can forget that these are real people—that they are individuals who need individual, tailor-made support.

I have talked about domestic violence refuges around the country and the £18.8 million of welcome funding that is already going into accommodation services. I urge the Minister and the Government to make sure that that money goes into supporting local authorities, as they are best placed to know the resource needed in their local area, but they might not always have the capacity and expertise to be able to roll that out, because we know that two thirds of women fleeing domestic violence are not going to want to stay in their local area. They will have to move from their local area, so just going to their local authority is not necessarily enough. Any move the Government can make to support local authorities in adding expertise will be gratefully received, rather than just letting them tackle that in isolation.

I welcome the Minister's words about the greater use of video. That is fundamental, and will ensure that victims do not have to make testimony after testimony, repeating the experience they have had and bringing it back to them. Instead they can have a sense of finality and closure by reporting it once, getting through their testimony once, and then bringing the perpetrator to justice. That will speed up the system and allow victims to move on with their lives.

2.16 pm

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): I thank those in the Chamber for their kind words. We all do the best that we possibly can for our constituents and the most vulnerable, and sometimes the consequences of doing so are a little startling, but colleagues have given me the confidence to keep on going, and I appreciate that.

Like many in this House, I regularly meet victims of crime before, during and after their involvement with the judicial process. Regrettably, very few have ever received the level of care, support and service that they should be able to expect. Sadly, what I hear most often is how traumatic the experience was. Survivors of child sexual exploitation will invariably tell me that their encounter with the judicial system was a second form of abuse.

The Minister's commitment to victims is admirable, and I will do all I can to support him in making the long overdue changes both in practice and the law, but we must now see real changes in how we support victims of crime. The Government's plan to address the current deficit is most welcome, but we now need to focus on the detail. There are statements about co-ordinating and about combining and reviewing the effectiveness of funding, but, with the exception of the £8 million increase in funding for sexual assault referral centres—SARCs—over the next three years, there appears to be little additional money entering the system. The Government's plans to reform the current funding streams do not appear to be fully formed. Minister, what is actually needed is simply more cash in the system.

In the strategy, it is acknowledged that in the current system for some victims,

“support is not always available as and when victims need it.”

That is correct, but it is the solution to this problem that we look to the Minister to deliver.

There are two areas of consideration in terms of victim support: first, the provision of early intervention services at the point of disclosure, such as SARCs; and, secondly, the accessibility of universal long-term services, such as mental health support, housing and benefits to victims in need of ongoing support. SARCs are of course crucial. A Council of Europe study found that there needs to be one sexual assault centre for every 400,000 women. According to the Office for National Statistics, there are currently 28 million women in England, but there are only 47 SARCs, leaving us 14 short of the recommended minimum standard. Please will the Minister look at making sure that this gap in provision is addressed, and that there is a SARC for everyone, regardless of where they live?

Providing such services is not just good for the victim; it is also good for justice. Bristol university has just demonstrated the vital role of independent sexual violence advisers—ISVAs—in improving criminal justice outcomes. Analysis of 585 rape cases showed that 36% had the support of ISVAs. Where an ISVA was involved, 43.2% of suspects were charged, as against 21.5% without their involvement. Convictions followed a similar pattern: a 12.3% conviction rate if the victim had an ISVA, as against 5.4% if they did not.

Predominantly, victims services are commissioned by police and crime commissioners using grant funding, but they are hamstrung by the Ministry of Justice, which generally makes grants on an annual basis. This means that small charities receive only short-term funding, which contributes to precarious finances, job insecurity and an inability to plan, making it much harder for them to invest in local services for the long term. As part of the review, will the Minister please commit to additional funding for services that act as first responders to victims, and consider granting PCCs grants for victims services for a period of more than one year?

The need for long-term support for services becomes even more pressing as there is so little detail in the strategy on securing such support for victims. SARCs and other victims services are brilliant at providing an emergency care package and then referring on to other services, yet too many victims receiving an assessment of their needs at a SARC face delays in accessing the recommended therapeutic services. The situation is worse for child victims. A University College London study this year found that 80% of girls aged between 13 and 17 experiencing sexual assault had at least one mental health disorder after five months, and that 55% had at least two. Last year, the Children's Commissioner said:

“We know that most adult mental health problems start in childhood and that without treatment, children's problems are likely to get worse.”

It is therefore appalling that Public Health England found in 2016 that only 25% of children who needed mental health treatment received it.

Where statutory services are unable to support victims, third sector organisations desperately try to make up the shortfall. Organisations such as Rape Crisis provide vital lifelines for victims and survivors in their time of crisis, yet they are unable to meet the demand with their current levels of funding. More than 6,000 women and girls are currently on Rape Crisis's waiting list, and in my constituency, the Rotherham abuse counselling service has 260 people on its current waiting list. The average waiting time is now seven months. Not to address this is

[Sarah Champion]

not only morally but fiscally irresponsible. To support victims of crime in a professional and timely manner enables them to quickly rebuild their lives. If we do not do that, the cost to the state resulting from, for example, mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependency, self-harm and issues around maintaining a job or relationship as a result of the crime will cost the state much more in the long term, not to mention the damage to the individual. Because of this, I urge the Minister to consider providing good-quality, statutory, immediate interventions followed by a seamless transition to statutory longer-term care for every victim and survivor of crime.

The victims strategy is an excellent first step, but for it to become more than words on a page, it must place a statutory duty on PCCs to publish a local victims' offer that sets out the minimum standards for supporting victims. It is my view, given their responsibility for commissioning victims' services, that PCCs are the best placed to co-ordinate this offer. It should include details of the services they are commissioning and the contributions of other key partners, including local authorities, health services and the third sector. Such an approach would force co-operation and encourage transparency, requiring local partners to use their funding and expertise to plug the gaps in the existing provision. The Victims' Commissioner could then be mandated to hold the PCCs and partner agencies to account for the quality of their victims' offer against an agreed gold standard.

**Tom Brake:** Does the hon. Lady think that PCCs might have a role to play in ensuring that all those who need to be trained to identify victims are properly trained to do so? I am talking about not only specialist staff but everyone in the voluntary sector, the police and elsewhere. In order to ensure that those services, which are often in great demand, can be accessed by victims, we need to ensure that those people have the right training to identify the victims in the first place.

**Sarah Champion:** I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's point. I know that a number of businesses are now training staff and colleagues to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and to support the victim by signposting the issue to the right agency.

I am now going to turn to my pet project. It involves a Government agency that is wilfully traumatising victims and operating a subjective system that often runs in the face of the law. Accompanying the announcement of the new victims strategy, it is most welcome that the Minister has announced a broad review of the criminal injuries compensation scheme and of the agency that administers it, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority—CICA. The scheme exists to provide compensation to victims of crime. Money can of course never heal the wounds, physical or mental, suffered by the victims of crime, but victims should at least be able to expect to receive the compensation to which they are entitled without those mental wounds being reopened by the administration body set up to support them. In short, CICA needs a radical overhaul to make it a victim-centred agency.

Victims' needs, their rights and their wellbeing should be at the core of everything CICA does, but the reality is very different. My constituents' experiences of CICA

have been that it exists not to support them, to honestly assess their claims or to award redress for their suffering, but rather to pursue every possible option to deny their claims. This can include questioning their injury, questioning the rulings of courts, or more appallingly, accusing them of complicity in their abuse. At every turn, CICA ignores the needs of victims in order to maintain its balance sheet. The Minister's review of the scheme cannot come soon enough for victims. Having supported a number of constituents through the process of making a claim, and through my extensive work with victims charities and organisations, it is abundantly clear to me that what is needed is a complete change in the culture of CICA and in how it treats the victims of crime. To be blunt, CICA's attitude to victims stinks.

I first became aware of the failings of CICA as I was supporting victims and survivors of the appalling child sexual exploitation that took place in Rotherham. As the victims came forward and the investigations and prosecutions progressed, a number of my constituents pursued compensation through the criminal injuries compensation scheme. Those young women had been through the most horrendous abuse. Their childhoods were stolen from them by criminal gangs who groomed them, trafficked them and repeatedly raped them. For many, the psychological damage they suffered as children continues to haunt them years later, yet many of their claims for compensation were denied by CICA. Problematically, the rules of the scheme state that victims and survivors who have convictions, even for completely unrelated issues, must have their compensation awards reduced or withheld. This rule is particularly pertinent in cases of child sexual exploitation.

**Bob Stewart:** I thank the hon. Lady for allowing me to intervene on her. She is a friend. In her experience, how long after the crime does it take for someone to get compensation, on average?

**Sarah Champion:** I would love to be able to give an answer to my hon. Friend, but the problem with CICA is that it does not publish—or, indeed, seem to work to—an agreed timetable. So the answer is that it is as long as a piece of string for some victims, and interminably long for others.

I want to return to what happens between CICA and children who have suffered sexual exploitation and abuse. As a result of their abuse, they are very likely to carry out some form of crime. Manipulating children to commit offences is a widely documented part of grooming and coercive control. I find it outrageous that what effectively amounts to a symptom of abuse—carrying out a crime—should be held against victims in order to deny them compensation. More outrageous still is the denial of such claims by CICA on the ground that a victim somehow consented to their abuse.

The scheme compensates only those survivors who did not “in fact” consent to a crime. CICA has chosen to interpret this to mean that even the very youngest of children who have been the victims of sexual abuse can be denied compensation if there is any evidence that they complied with their abuser. Minister, maybe they complied because they were terrified of what would happen if they did not, or because they were so controlled and mentally manipulated that not to comply would never have been a consideration. The law is abundantly



clear when it comes to consent: where a person is under the age of 16, sexual activity is automatically criminal unless the victim is older than 13 and the defendant reasonably believes that he or she is over 16. That CICA should effectively ignore this and, through a process that is wholly opaque, find that a child provided consent is shocking. In response to concerns raised by me and others, new guidelines on consent have been issued to CICA, but flaws in the scheme itself remain, as does CICA's attitude towards victims.

I want to pay tribute to a Rotherham survivor of CSE, Sammy Woodhouse, who has used her experience of CICA to campaign on this issue. I will read a section of the letter she received from CICA about her compensation claim:

"I am not satisfied that your consent was falsely given as a result of being groomed by the offender. The evidence does not indicate that you were manipulated or progressively lured into a false relationship."

Based on that, Sammy's application was rejected. Imagine the impact that receiving that letter had on her. In her opinion, the state was saying that she was complicit in her own abuse. I am glad to say that Sammy had the strength to appeal and had the decision overturned, but many other victims do not have that strength. For the record, Sammy's abuser is currently serving 35 years. The judge believed Sammy; CICA did not. A freedom of information request showed that 700 child victims of sexual abuse were similarly refused payments in the past five years. Will the Minister please review those cases to check whether similar injustices have happened?

CICA's apparent determination to deny claims at all costs is exemplified by the experience of another of my constituents—not a survivor of abuse, but a former police officer injured in the line of duty. My constituent suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result. They first made a claim in 2013, and it was finally settled earlier this year following numerous court rulings in the applicant's favour and only after two interventions from me.

Throughout the claim, CICA presented various arguments as to why it should not be accepted, culminating in a court ruling that settled all outstanding disputes in my constituent's favour and directed CICA to conclude the case. Yet CICA's response was to question whether my constituent even suffered from PTSD, something for which extensive medical evidence was provided and had even previously been ruled upon by a court. Having been asked to again prove that they suffered from the condition, my constituent understandably determined that CICA would simply present argument after argument, each of which they would be forced to counter, only to start the whole process again. My constituent concluded, not unreasonably, that CICA sought to draw out the process in the hope that they would simply give up. That kind of seemingly endless process, with no clear timescales nor explanation of what is happening with a claim, is as unprofessional as it is unfair. Yet that seems to be standard practice for CICA.

Of course, it is important that CICA assesses the eligibility of claims under the scheme and that claims are subjected to appropriate checks, but if CICA fails to support victims of crime, fails to include them in the process, fails to explain that process to them and fails to make decisions in a reasonable timeframe, it is not helping victims; it is harming them. The scheme itself

often fails to make any accommodation for circumstance, something which CICA proceeds to exacerbate by failing, or being unable, to take account of context in its decision making. By way of example, paragraph 23 of the scheme states:

"An award will be withheld unless the applicant has cooperated as far as reasonably practicable in bringing the assailant to justice."

The paragraph's intent is clear, but the real world is rarely so straightforward.

I am aware of several cases in which individuals providing care to vulnerable adults with challenging behaviour have been assaulted in the course of their work. Many such victims understandably choose not to pursue criminal charges against their assailant—although some do. As a consequence, the victims are ineligible for compensation under the scheme and CICA denies their claims. Yet these crimes are no less severe and the harm they suffer is no less acute. The scheme must, so far as is practical, allow for such context to be taken into account. I am delighted that the Minister has already committed to abolish the so-called same-roof rule. That much-needed change overturns a profound injustice that has lingered for far too long. However, I ask the Minister not to take his foot off the pedal. Survivors are already coming to me with concerns about the timescale.

Fundamentally, if the Government are serious about reform, they cannot allow the criminal injuries compensation scheme and CICA to continue as they are. Revised guidelines on consent are a welcome step, but CICA can only interpret the scheme, which is fundamentally flawed when it comes to child abuse. In particular, the scheme fails to acknowledge grooming as a crime of violence. That arguably excludes victims of CSE if their abuse does not include sexual contact. Consequently, serious crimes, such as exploiting children to perform sexual acts online, are not compensated, even for extremely young children. On unspent convictions, a recent High Court ruling found that three women forced into prostitution as teenagers will no longer have to disclose related convictions to potential employers. It is high time that the criminal injuries compensation scheme took a similar sensible approach to the award of compensation to victims of crime who have unrelated criminal convictions.

The review must carefully assess how CICA currently operates in order to deliver a victim-focused agency. Small changes, such as the provision of concrete timeframes to claimants and clear explanations of the claims process, would go a long way to improving the journey for victims of crime. It is also important to promote the scheme, because most of the claimants with whom I have dealt discovered the scheme by accident, rather than through a formal process of victim support. Most important, however, is a change of attitude. It must be made clear to CICA that its job is to administer the scheme fairly and transparently. It should be made clear that it is not CICA's role to deploy every possible delaying tactic and every conceivable legal argument to seek to deny victims of crime the compensation to which they should be entitled. The victims strategy and the review of the criminal injuries compensation scheme present a timely opportunity to deliver fundamental cultural change to how we treat victims of crime. I hope that the Government will reflect on the concerns raised in this debate and ensure that this opportunity is not squandered.

2.36 pm

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): This is just my luck. I come to the Chamber to make two brief but personal points only to be preceded by a subject matter expert. The hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) is clearly a black belt in all details relating to this topic, so before I even begin my speech I feel somewhat inadequate—

**Gavin Newlands:** Hear, hear. [*Laughter.*]

**Eddie Hughes:** Not funny. However, I will proceed with my speech anyway.

On 28 September, according to the *Express & Star*, a young man in my constituency was involved in an altercation with some other boys. This 10-year-old lad was wearing hearing aids at the time, but they were pulled off his ears and stamped on during the altercation. The incident was reported in the local newspaper and clearly struck a chord with the local community. Earlier on, my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) mentioned the idea that the compensation scheme should be “pacey” and the hon. Member for Rotherham just highlighted the fact that there is no timetable for compensation, but I am delighted to say that the good people of Beechdale and Walsall moved quicker than that.

Michelle Mansell set up a crowdfunding page through JustGiving. She intended to try to raise £500, stating on the page that she wanted to show the boy that there are more good people out there than bad. That £500 target was quickly reached and surpassed, so she then set the bar at £1,500. Just before I got up to speak, I noticed that the current amount is £5,778, which just goes to show that while the victims strategy is valid and while it is incredibly important that we as a Government provide support for victims, the support provided by close family, friends and the community is perhaps more important. The intention is not that that responsibility should be abdicated to the Government.

Like many other people, I would obviously like to see more police on our streets. I have lobbied the Chancellor and the Policing Minister to achieve that, but a conversation that I had with a chief constable some time ago encapsulated part of the problem and the reason for this victims strategy. He said that the police can do anything, but they cannot do everything. If there is a problem with crime in a particular area, the police could flood in and massively reduce or eradicate the crime, but that would only create crime in areas from where resources had been redeployed. Regardless of how many police we have, we must accept that there will always be victims of crime, which is why the strategy is so valid.

Before I became an MP, I worked for YMCA in Birmingham, a homeless charity for young people providing 300 units of accommodation. We set up our business to ensure that senior members of staff were based in areas where we offered residential accommodation, so the opportunity to see young people who were having the benefit of our services on a daily basis was a natural part of the job and there I heard stories of young people who had lived in families where domestic violence was prevalent.

The Children’s Commissioner published a report earlier this year and the figures stated suggested that 825,000 children in the UK were in a family where domestic

violence is prevalent. This is not just a UK problem. I briefly read a report from UNICEF that suggests that at any one time there might be as many as 275 million children facing the problem around the world. The problem is huge and complex, because the exposure to that domestic violence might take many forms. The children might witness it first hand, they might be in another room listening, or they might be upstairs lying on their bed frightened about what is occurring.

The treatment of this problem and the support given to those young people will take many different forms, so I was delighted to read the prospectus that the Government produced in July setting out how people could apply for a chunk of that £8 million of funding. My understanding is that the minimum grant people would apply for is £500,000, and one of the most important things in considering those applications for funding is that the project being proposed should be scalable and should demonstrate interaction with other parties. Many stakeholders should be involved. Why? Because the experience those children will have will manifest itself in many different ways. With some resilient children, it might be hardly noticeable, but with others it might have some serious psychological effects. The terrible thing would be that the change in their behaviour would be interpreted by those who interact with them, perhaps by social workers or school teachers, as having a different source, so it is incredibly important that we provide funds to ensure absolutely that we provide all the support we can for the 825,000 children who might be experiencing domestic violence in their home. That is why I so strongly welcome the report presented by the Minister.

2.42 pm

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I will try to keep my remarks brief, as I do not want to repeat the comments made by many colleagues this afternoon. I do want to echo some of the points that have been made, however, particularly by those who have pointed out that we have been waiting for this strategy for far too long. The Government promised in 2015 to enshrine rights for victims in law. Three years later, the Government are still not announcing primary legislation but, instead, another consultation, which we are told to expect some time next year.

For it to take more than three years to achieve this is, quite frankly, not good enough. I know from people in my constituency about their issues as victims struggling to navigate the criminal justice system. They have suffered delays in responses, a lack of communication and have even found out that offenders have been released without their knowledge.

A survivor of sexual assault from my constituency told me she felt “punished” by the system. After being raped, she had to wait months before her case was sent to the CPS. There were delays in the case and, during that time, the rapist had been accused of sexually assaulting someone else. More delays took place while the CPS decided if the cases would be tried separately, together or at all. She then found out that some of her evidence was lost by the police, creating yet more delays. Following all this pressure, she developed post-traumatic stress disorder and had to take a lot of time off work, hugely impacting her career. Until the case is closed, it is impossible for her to move on with her recovery. Every time she has to deal with the police, it triggers her PTSD.

The experience many victims have of the criminal justice system is frankly disgraceful. We need a victims law with teeth and I am concerned that without huge changes across Government, victims' experience of the criminal justice system will not get better. How can the Government seriously improve the experiences of victims while slashing funding for legal aid and cutting police budgets?

In the past eight years, 21,000 police officers have been axed across the country. Police forces are stretched, and the number of cases that are closed without being resolved keeps increasing. This year, the number of rape cases resulting in a conviction was the lowest in a decade, and the CPS was criticised for dropping cases despite strong evidence. It is no surprise that many victims are left wondering whether they should have even bothered reporting something to begin with.

In my constituency, I know that members of my community have been reluctant to speak to the police in the wake of violent crimes. Witnesses worry about their safety when speaking out, especially in areas where trust in the police is low. I am thinking of one family in particular. My constituent Sharon's son was murdered three years ago. Sharon never felt supported by the judicial system. There was no emotional or practical support. When her son's case went to a retrial, Sharon had to go through the pain of reliving her ordeal all over again, but if justice had been served, it would have been worth while. At the end of the retrial, the case was closed without any convictions.

The lack of a conviction has been devastating for Sharon and her family, but it has also had an impact on the wider community. When such cases are left unresolved, it can damage a community's faith in the criminal justice system and make it less likely that witnesses will come forward in future.

Then there are the cuts to legal aid. The number of people standing up in court with no legal advice or representation has risen unacceptably under this Government. Last year, two out of three people appearing in court had no legal representation whatsoever. That is shameful. One family in my constituency resorted to crowdfunding for legal fees after their daughter died in the care of a private mental health clinic. Her family want to make sure nothing like this ever happens again, but they had no automatic right to legal aid for an inquest. They met obstacles at every stage. Reviews were cancelled at the last moment; the coroner was dismissive and aggressive to them on the phone, and they had to fight for a judicial review to replace the coroner, which would not have been possible without crowdfunding yet again from the public. I agree with the hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes), who said that although it is great that people give to crowdfunding appeals, we should not always rely on that.

Access to justice must be a fundamental, democratic right. Instead, we have reached a point where justice is for those lucky enough to afford it. For all the families who have been impacted, in Lewisham Deptford and across the country, we must seek a victims law as soon as possible. They should not have to wait any longer.

2.48 pm

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab):** I welcome this debate on victims' rights and look forward to the Minister's response. I also welcome the fact that the Government have committed to overhauling their victims of crime strategy. There is widespread recognition that the system needs to change. We have seen some welcome improvements in the way in which victims of crime are treated, but they have been piecemeal and unco-ordinated. As many right hon. and hon. Members will know from talking to constituents who have been victims of crime or from their conversations with the police, probation officers or victim support groups, our current system is just not working.

For many victims of crime, especially children, victims of sexual assault and rape, and victims of racially aggravated crimes, the system is simply not fit for purpose. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) eloquently explained, the cuts to legal aid have had even more damaging effects on access to justice. At Reading Crown court last month, an offender was sentenced to five years for assault and robbery in a car park in my constituency. The victim, a 39-year-old man, was forced to strip naked and was left utterly humiliated. The criminal will be free in a couple of years, but his victim will carry the trauma like a yoke on his shoulders for the rest of his days. How confident are we that the victim will get the lifelong support he will need?

The system remains complex, confusing and alienating for victims. The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority is creaking, cumbersome and slow. As has been highlighted earlier, the system fails to recognise the impact of crime on mental health—that is particularly pertinent, as we marked Mental Health Awareness Day yesterday—and the lasting damage beyond the mere material to a victim's wellbeing. It may be a cliché, but it is true: a victim of crime suffers twice, once at the hands of the criminal and again at the hands of the criminal justice system.

Right hon. and hon. Members may recall that a crime was committed just outside Parliament in February when my guest Ravneet Singh, a committed internationalist and environmentalist, was assaulted. The assailant grabbed and tried to remove his turban. Sikhs consider the turban to be a crown on the head and, therefore, sacrosanct. This left Mr Singh humiliated and hurt, and potentially with a terrible impression of our country and our Parliament. Many Sikhs who choose to wear a turban are victims of this type of assault—I have been myself—and I am sorry to say that often the authorities have failed to take it seriously, despite the deep offence and dismay it causes.

Other crimes, such as domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault and stalking, have not been taken seriously enough by our system. Most victims of those crimes do not even come forward, with some estimates suggesting that 85% of serious sexual assaults are not even reported. So we need a new approach: a massive cultural shift that turns our criminal justice system into a criminal justice service, with victims at the heart, not the edges. Citizens must believe that the system is on their side and will work for them.

I am proud to say that in 2015 the Labour party published the comprehensive report of its victims taskforce. That was led by Baroness Doreen Lawrence, Peter

[Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhési]

Neyroud, the former Thames Valley chief constable, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). It is a great shame that the 14 recommendations were not implemented, as that would have given us the joined-up, victim-centred system we so desperately need. The centrepiece of the report is the call for a single, clear victims law enshrining the rights of victims across the entire criminal justice system. I restate my support today for a single, transparent victims law. It would give victims access to justice from their very first dealings with the police and beyond, into dealings with the courts and prison service. The role of the Victims' Commissioner would be enhanced. Every police area should have an area victims plan, evaluated and approved by the Victims' Commissioner. Victims should have the right to a review if the police or prosecutors drop a case, as so often happens. Victims should have the right to information and updates, and not be left for months in the dark. In particular, when a victim of a crime comes forward, their allegation must be recorded and allocated a crime number. That is supported by the code of conduct and by the EU directive on victims' rights, yet the evidence shows there has been slippage, especially in cases of domestic violence and sexual assault.

We must ensure that the system does not judge victims of crime based on lazy stereotypes of how a victim is supposed to behave, especially when it comes to sexual assault and rape. We need only to look at recent events in the United States and the shameful treatment of Dr Christine Blasey Ford during the Kavanaugh confirmation hearings. I hope that the whole House will commend the courage of Dr Christine Blasey Ford and condemn utterly the way that President Trump mocked her testimony in public. We may hope and pray that nothing like that could ever happen here, but for thousands of women in the British criminal justice system, their treatment is no less humiliating, as explained by previous speakers.

Lastly, there is the crucial question of funding. The truth is that eight years of austerity have left our criminal justice system less robust, less able to mete out justice fairly and efficiently and less able to support victims crime. I raised these issues during a recent Westminster Hall debate on continued Government court closures that I had the honour of opening. The Minister is in charge of a system in meltdown. The Crown Prosecution Service has seen its budget cut by a quarter since 2010 and staff numbers have fallen by 2,400; the head of the CPS and the head of the probation service have resigned amid chaos; and prison violence and suicide rates are rising.

There are fewer police on the streets. Earlier this year, in my own area, the Thames Valley police reported a shortfall of 98 officers and further cuts of £14.3 million until 2020-21. Of course, that has a negative impact on the victims of crime. Were the criminal justice system a school, it would now be in special measures; were it a council, it would have been taken over by commissioners by now. That leaves us with a big question: without the resources, how can we have confidence that the Government's victims strategy will work? This was ably pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), whose determined and dedicated

work in this field I wholeheartedly commend. Unless Ministers can tell us today that there will be adequate funding for victims, how can we believe that this year's initiative is not just yet another piecemeal fix?

The price paid for cuts to justice is not paid by criminals; it is paid by the victims of crime. I am proud to support the Labour party in its endeavours on this issue, because only Labour will end austerity, only Labour will put the police back on to the streets of Slough and every community in our country, and only Labour is truly on the side of the victim.

2.57 pm

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): There has been some consensus in the Chamber about the direction of the victims strategy. I certainly agree with the Minister's statement that how we treat victims is an indication of the kind of country we are. Sadly, though, as we have heard—Members from all parties have talked about some heart-rending cases—that support is not there as often as it should be.

Although we have seen improvements over the past 20 years, many victims, particularly victims of personal or sexual crimes, lack the confidence to come forward, lack proper support if they do, and face an unacceptable ordeal if their case gets to the courtroom. When they do come forward, victims of crime regularly complain that communication and treatment are consistently poor across all criminal justice agencies. That really has to change, and I know that the Minister recognises that.

I genuinely welcome the Government's victims strategy and have considerable regard for the Minister, who was formerly my co-chair of the all-party group on dementia. However, like many of my colleagues, I am concerned that, more than three years since the promise was made to legislate for a victims law, we are still waiting for one.

The Minister will be aware of the plethora of codes, charters and guidance that have moved support for victims on, albeit too slowly, but without it being enshrined in law the effectiveness of the changes is inconsistent. As has already been mentioned, we need to consider the financial and operational pressures on the criminal justice system. That was highlighted in this week's "Dispatches" on screening out crimes. There is a danger that services to victims will come a poor second priority to operational demands.

Recently, I met my excellent chief superintendent who operates not just in Oldham, but in Rochdale and Tameside—when I was first elected, he was just based in Oldham, but now he has to cover three areas. I know that the force struggles to deal with the full range of policing duties. It is at crisis point, as the police have to cover many issues that, previously, social services, particularly children's social services, would have dealt with. What will happen to those forces in the future? We do need greater support for victims in the policing system, so what will happen to that support given the difficulties that the force currently faces?

This week, the Victims' Commissioner for London and founder of Voice4Victims, Claire Waxman, stated:

"The Government's victims' strategy aims to improve victims' experiences, but unless they address the cuts to police funding, victims will continue to feel 'ignored'. This impacts communities who will feel vulnerable and at risk."

In addition, the closure of more than 230 courts since 2010 leads to victims facing longer travelling times, and that is hardly offset by the improvement in waiting facilities, which was also promised in the strategy.

The victims code was a significant and positive development when it was introduced in 2005 and it should be supported, but although its provisions remain important, they are not directly enforceable, which is why a victims' law is so urgently needed. I gently repeat my disappointment that, in addition to the concerns about cuts to the criminal justice system and more widely to public services as a whole, we have not had that commitment to the victims law.

I welcome many measures in the strategy, including the reform of the criminal injuries compensation fund. However, the description given by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) of the organisation that manages that fund was absolutely shocking. I congratulate her once again on everything that she does for victims of child sexual exploitation. It is important that we fund that system so that we address the significant financial pressures that victims face. Also welcome is the promise of new guidance on pre-trial therapy and the recognition of the need for dedicated support for victims, but we need to go further.

PC Nicola Hughes was one of my constituents. Members will remember that she, along with her colleague PC Fiona Bone, was cruelly murdered six years ago in the line of duty. Nicola's father, Bryn Hughes, has suggested that more needs to be done to provide immediate financial help for practical things such as funeral costs and travelling costs to and from courts. As a divorced parent, he has said that more needs to be done to ensure that both parents are supported and kept informed during and after the investigation and trial. Again, that does not always happen.

I have to say that I was horrified to hear about the family of our former colleague, PC Keith Palmer. They were not able to get legal aid and had to rely on pro bono support when it came to the inquest. Surely that shames us all. Given the dedication and support that our police officers give, that really does show how much they have been let down.

Many campaigners have also expressed disappointment that there is no commitment to appointing the independent advocates for victims as a single point of contact to help navigate the criminal justice system. I recognise the role of the public advocate, but, as described, it is not broad enough as those advocates will not be able to represent bereaved families at inquiries or at inquests. Again, I would welcome hearing something from the Minister on that.

Last month, when the Minister presented his statement on the strategy, I raised the very distressing case of Liane Singleton, who was brutally murdered in 1998 by Paul Stowers. What the family went through was really absolutely atrocious. Liane was mutilated and her body parts were put in bin bags. It was horrendous. How any parent can recover from that, I have no idea.

Liane's parents, Gordon and Jacky Singleton, are my constituents. They have been trying to prevent the release of Stowers, including by petitioning Parliament back in July. Last month, they found out that they had failed and he is due to be released next month. They felt dreadfully let down by the criminal justice system and

totally powerless to influence the Parole Board. I know that the Parole Board will be taking steps to ensure that there is a presumption that a victim's personal statement can be read in hearings.

**Vicky Foxcroft:** From experience in my constituency, I know about the horrific events that people go through, and having to relive them causes trauma for families and local communities. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is why it is so important that we get a victims law?

**Debbie Abrahams:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for intervening to give me a moment. It has been quite traumatic just listening to Jacky and Gordon, but it puts into context the importance of what we are doing here, including all of us who have stayed to represent our constituents.

The Parole Board will listen to the personal statement, but I welcome anything the Minister can say about how this will be taken forward. He mentioned that this will be reviewed in January, but I would welcome a bit more detail about that and the new rules that will be required.

I share the view of the Victims' Commissioner, Baroness Newlove, that any challenge mechanism should not require members of the public to have to crowdfund to pay for legal representation, and that a reconsideration process should be judge-led. Recognising that it is likely that the majority of reconsideration applicants will be offenders, will the Minister commit to a speedy and properly funded process to ensure that the benefits to victims of having the right to challenge a decision is not outweighed by the distress caused to other victims of waiting months for a final parole outcome?

I have met with the group Justice After Acquittal, founded by another constituent, Ann Roberts, and Carole Longe, to whom I pay tribute for their many years of hard work and campaigning for murder victims' families. As the Minister will know, bereaved families are very concerned that when a family member has been killed and no one has been brought to justice, or when there has been an acquittal, there has been very little by way of a framework governing whether and when the case will be reviewed by police and prosecutors.

Last year, the national standards of support were launched by the CPS and the Metropolitan police—I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who did a lot in his previous role to bring this about—and their work with Justice After Acquittal has been very much welcomed. However, I would be grateful if the Minister let me know how these standards are being monitored. How many families have been offered and have taken up the offer of a post-acquittal meeting since its introduction?

The Government should be on notice that we are not prepared to wait much longer for the victims law. Victims need to be informed, supported and listened to. They need to be able to challenge decisions on their cases now. They need their rights to be placed into law so they are central to our criminal justice system. The victims code should be put into primary legislation and independent advocates should be fully funded to draw up a support package to meet the victims' needs, represent them in dealing with agencies and support them at every step of a trial.

[Debbie Abrahams]

I will continue to press the Minister to look again at a mechanism for providing independent advocates to help victims to navigate the complex and intimidating criminal justice system, in addition to registered intermediaries following the Victims' Commissioner's statement that the number of registered intermediaries must rise to meet demand. I do not believe that an increase of 25% is anywhere near enough.

Finally, from a victim's point of view our justice system is not fit for purpose. The family of Liane Singleton, facing the imminent release of her killer, feel let down. Others such as Carole Longe, Ann Roberts, Bryn Hughes and Claire Waxman, to name but a few, have had to campaign for years following failures in the criminal justice system to protect victims' rights. For too long, victims have felt like an afterthought in the process. The Government continue to produce strategy documents, but victims need action now. I will not let the Minister rest until he has finally introduced a victims law.

3.10 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) for her compassion and care for her constituents. We are all aware of that, but today was a supreme example of how she feels, and I congratulate her on that. I thank Mr Speaker and the House for hearing this issue. I thank the Minister and Her Majesty's Government for the hard work that they have done on the victims strategy and what they have brought forward.

I was just looking at the Front Bench and thinking that some of the Ministers entered Parliament in the same year as me and some a year or two after. It is always good to see Members of my intake who have done well, and I congratulate the Ministers on their elevation to important places. It is clear when we ask them questions that they have a deep interest in the subject matter, and that is refreshing. I also congratulate other Ministers who were present earlier.

In Northern Ireland we are attempting to clarify exactly what constitutes a victim. There would appear to be a difficulty in distinguishing between someone who is blown up by a bomb and the person who sets the bomb and then runs away from it. There is a difficulty in establishing that being shot by the armed forces in the midst of firing at them in the first instance in a terrorist attack does not make you a victim; indeed, it makes you a perpetrator. That is the Northern Ireland context. These things were simple in my youth, which was not yesterday. If I cut myself breaking someone's window, which I knew I should not have done, I was more concerned about the punishment from my mother's wooden spoon or maybe a leather strap. It never did me any harm. Probably it could be said that she did not hit me hard enough or long enough, but there you are. These things have been made so complex in Northern Ireland, but that is a debate for a different day. This debate is about the victims strategy here on the mainland.

I commend all the Members who have spoken, especially the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). Others have said it, but I want to put it on record in *Hansard* that she has shown great courage, strength and determination in forwarding the case for her constituents. We have followed that in the press, and some of the

press has not been very nice to her. That makes me angry and makes us all annoyed in this House. The hon. Lady needs to know that every one of us stands with her in taking her stance for justice and right. Well done.

I have been interested in victims for some 34 years in public service. I was first a councillor, then a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly and then was privileged to be elected Member of Parliament for Strangford. This is my 34th year in public service. I have met broken men and women, the victims of crime whose lives have been irrevocably altered. Families have seen their loved one destroyed, and then re-traumatised by the court case. Every Member who has spoken has referred to individual cases, and we can all do that. I shall refer to one later, without mentioning any names. Families are torn apart through no fault of their own.

It is my desire and the desire of the House that the victims strategy will seek to make changes to help those individuals and their families. I was eager to read the strategy and did so to see just how we could and would do better. I believe that, should the strategy be implemented and the heart of the strategy become a reality, it will give victims more support. The intentions of Her Majesty's Government are clear, and we welcome that.

As my mother often said, money does not grow on trees. Like most of us, I come from a home where I had love and affection, but not much else money-wise. That did not do us any harm, because it moulded us into who we are today when it comes to speaking on social issues in the Chamber.

I have concerns as to how I can see these changes brought about in Northern Ireland, as I know that the victims strategy is for England and Wales, but the concerns about implementation do not take away from the positive things in this document that I sincerely want to see implemented as a matter of urgency.

The first three key entitlements of the code are things that I have been pushing for and have been keen to see happen, and they can be summed up as better support after the crime and right through to the trial, and an acknowledgment that a statement and trial date are simply not enough. The fact is that many victims do not understand what has happened to them, and there is uncertainty about a legal process that looks convoluted and extremely detailed to them, which sows an environment of fear. I was pleased therefore to see that the code will include entitlement to a written acknowledgment that someone has reported a crime, including the basic details of the offence; an enhanced service for a victim of serious crime, a persistently targeted victim or a vulnerable or intimidated victim—that is another clear commitment by Her Majesty's Government and the Minister; and a needs assessment to help work out what support someone needs. All those things are good, and they set in train a strategy that we should all welcome and look forward to seeing implemented.

I have sat with constituents in the period between them giving their statement and hearing about the trial, and the uncertainty in between adds to the anxiety. While my staff and I may give general, generic advice, we are often unable to speak to the victim as, rightly, the halls of justice are not open for us to inquire. The standard response that they cannot comment on an ongoing case, while understandable, is not helpful for the victim and their family, who do not know how to

carry on with their life while the wheels of justice indeterminately but slowly turn, on an often lengthy journey.

The code will ensure that for serious crimes there is a detailed, enhanced service and an assessment of support needed. The indication to me is that a support worker will be available to get information and support to the victim in the interim. Can the Minister confirm that that is the case?

I welcome the commitment to a more transparent and easier-to-access compensation system. We need that. The very real and personal cases that Members have outlined show how the system has fallen down. The hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth, for instance, referred to our police officer who was murdered here last year and whose family could not even access legal aid. That is an example of the injustice we see in the system. I know that the Minister is committed to seeing better compensation programmes and strategies, and I will be glad to see that.

I am pleased that there are now options to be informed if the suspect is to be prosecuted or not or given an out-of-court disposal—it is important that victims know that—and to seek a review of the police and the CPS's decision not to prosecute, in accordance with the National Police Chiefs' Council and CPS victims' right to review schemes. Those are all good suggestions in the victims strategy.

I would like to ensure that when victims are given information about seeking a review, there is support in the process, as many victims do not have legal knowledge or background and find it overwhelming trying to come to terms with the foreign language of justice and protocol. We are all simple people—I am, anyway. I like to have things explained to me in nice, simple terms, and I think my constituents would like the same, because that makes it easier to follow. It is all right for those with a legal mind, and there are many Members in the Chamber who are much brighter than I am, but we must make it simple for the ordinary person, because if they can follow it, they know what they want.

I have asked the Minister to confirm that a support worker will be available, to ensure that the process is understood, and I think, from his indication, that that certainly will happen. That is what I envisage, and I hope it is what the Department envisages. I would appreciate it if the Minister addressed that in his response or at a later date, if that is suitable.

A previous speaker referred to suicide, and just in the last few days the Government have committed to appoint a suicide prevention Minister. In the legal process, people feel such trauma, pressure and anxiety that sometimes things happen. Will the Solicitor General have an opportunity during the appointment process to discuss with the person given the responsibility for tackling suicide what can be done about the traumatic and emotional pressures that can be experienced during legal processes?

As usual in a debate of this magnitude, which has so many essential elements, time has beaten me, but in the minutes remaining, I want to highlight the provisions on opting into the victim contact scheme if the offender is sentenced to 12 months or more for a specified violent or sexual offence, and subsequently making a victim personal statement for consideration by the Parole

Board if the offender is considered for release or transfer; the victim may apply to the Parole Board to read out the statement at the hearing. I want to draw a case to the House's attention, although I will not mention any names.

I have been reading lately in my local papers about one woman's fight to ensure that a serial rapist is not released back into the community. He is a totally abhorrent, violent person, with a clear record of serial offences. The media have highlighted the fact that this serial predator—that is what he is—was released in 2013 and raped again in a different region. There is little doubt that, five years later, the danger is still there, yet this individual is up for parole. How on earth can that be the case? I have not given details or names, so I do not expect the Solicitor General to be familiar with the case. To me, there is something totally abhorrent about this case—it really makes me quite angry and upset. This absolutely inspirational woman has waived anonymity and told her horrific story in an attempt to raise awareness and stop what happened to her happening to another woman. I salute her spirit, bravery and courage, and I am sure everyone here feels the same way. The fact remains, however, that she went public because she does not have faith in the Parole Board and the justice system. She is a victim the system has let down, and her words must carry more weight.

I want to ensure that the Department takes such cases into account. I honestly believe that the Solicitor General is the person who can do that. All the stories, singular and collective, that we have recounted here show our heartfelt need for such an assurance. Any proposed strategy must make it certain that victims do not feel that their only recourse to protect others is to make their private pain a public issue.

I am also keen on videolinks for children and women who have been abused. The hon. Member for Rotherham will know about the cases in her area, but cases I have observed from a distance as a Member of Parliament, in my own area and further afield, have shown me the necessity of the protection that videolinks afford for children and women who have been abused. We have some good things in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Last week, with other parliamentarians I visited Pakistan, where the level of sexual violence is horrendous—atrocious. We encouraged the authorities there to do some of the things we have asked Ministers here to do, such as ensuring the availability of videolinks, giving protection from perpetrators and helping to minimise the impact on victims.

I thank all those Members who have taken part in the debate. I look to the Solicitor General for a careful response. I hope he will take up some of our suggestions and answer our questions. I thank him for the steps taken thus far, which I hope will provide a solid foundation for real change in the way we treat victims of crime.

3.24 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, may I thank Madam Deputy Speaker for letting me make a brief contribution this afternoon, and may I apologise to the Minister for not being present for his opening remarks? I particularly regret that because he provided a one-to-one briefing for my friend, Baroness Brinton, on the victims code, and he was very engaging in that process—I might refer to some of the points that she raised during that discussion.

[Tom Brake]

I wish to restate the commendation made by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) for Ray and Vi Donovan and their work on restorative justice, because he and I find them truly inspirational. Every now and again we come across people who really have an impact, and what they have been through, and how they used it to further an invaluable cause—that of restorative justice—is inspirational and they deserve to be described in that way.

I wish to make two points. In an earlier intervention I mentioned the importance of training and of ensuring that all those who need to be able to identify victims are suitably trained. That is not just about specialist staff, because if the first point of contact is a helpline where perhaps training has not been given and a person is not identified as a victim, that person then has no chance whatsoever of accessing services. I hope that the Minister will respond briefly on training and how he sees that being taken beyond just specialist staff.

Unless the Minister did so in his opening remarks, I do not think anyone has referred to the importance of providing support to victims and their families after a homicide abroad. A number of Members may have been involved in cases—as have I—that involved serious assaults or murders that took place abroad. One case I was involved with related to a murder that allegedly took place in a Brazilian police station. Although everyone appreciates how difficult it is for victims' families in this country to get the support they need when a homicide takes place in the UK, people will understand how much more difficult it is for families whose loved ones have been murdered abroad, given the challenges of different legal systems, languages, and criminal systems that are often far inferior to ours.

The Minister has given an undertaking that the victims strategy will consider enhancing support for victims' families after there has been a homicide in the United Kingdom, but I hope that when he responds to the debate he will also say whether the Government will ensure parity in the support given to victims' families when a homicide takes place abroad.

3.27 pm

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): We have heard today some eloquent and passionate speeches about victims, the criminal system, the civil justice system, and about witnesses—especially those who see horrendous crimes. It is a pleasure for me to wind up this debate, because as somebody who was a prosecutor for 14 years and still practised criminal law thereafter, one of my roles in the Crown Prosecution Service was as a child abuse and rape specialist. I dealt with victims and witnesses who had seen some of the most horrific crimes, and exposure to such cases and to witnesses and victims makes me feel passionately about this area of public space.

Although we welcome the strategy that has been outlined, many things are missing from it, such as a timescale for when things will be rolled out, and information on what funding will be provided or how the scheme will be rolled out across the country. The strategy seems to contain ideas, but nothing about whether there will be legislation for those ideas. Some measures will clearly require legislation, and I will go into the details of that.

Apart from a fair trial, the foundation of any justice system, particularly the criminal justice system, is to ensure that the witnesses and victims of appalling crimes are treated properly during the collation of evidence, the trial process and thereafter. We have discussed violence and direct victims, but we also have to look at victims in the wider context. The experience of victims and witnesses in the criminal and civil justice system has been found wanting in several ways and many hon. Members have today touched on those issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) talked about cases where evidence has been lost. We know of cases where disclosure has not been done in time and the cases have been dismissed for want of prosecution. We know that the Crown Prosecution Service, the prosecuting authority, has had at least one quarter of its budget slashed. These things make a big difference to the ability of the prosecution to perform their jobs properly, in time and in due manner.

We also know that across the country, with cuts to policing and funding for specialist services, victims can often be left unsupported and exposed to further risk. Hon. Members have spoken about the fact that the victim of a crime suffers twice: once during the actual offence and once through the process in the courts. There are supposed to be systems in place in the court system, but regrettably far too often they are not followed. Many victims and witnesses to appalling crimes have a really appalling experience. That needs to be addressed properly. I am afraid that the strategy document does not really deal with those issues.

I am trying not to be party political, because much of the debate has been about recognising the need for things to be done, but we cannot get away from the fact that if you cut police numbers by 20,000, if you cut the youth budget by over 50%, and if you cut the budget relating to mental health, drug rehabilitation, detoxification centres and dealing with alcohol addiction, you are going to have problems. There has been a rise in violent crimes, especially among youngsters. It is not a surprise that at the same time support to young people, diverting them away from the criminal justice system, has been cut. I say that in the spirit of the fact that these are issues that we all need to address. I know the Minister understands the criminal justice system well—we served on the Justice Committee together—as a barrister and a recorder. He is very aware of what happens in our courts. He probably knows about the problems I am talking about, too.

We have heard hon. Members talk about their constituents. My hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Mr Dhesi) and for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) talked about the impact the cuts have had on their police forces and the criminal justice system. We must not forget the court closures that have been taking place across the country. One direct result of that has been that many victims and witnesses have to travel for hours on end to get to a court that is often on the other side of their county. Sometimes one journey takes five or six hours. That cannot be good for them. I know that for many people the thought of having to spend hours travelling will and does put them off. Those responsible for committing crimes can get away with them because witnesses do not turn up. I am sure nobody wants that situation to continue.



Many Members have asked for real changes in the law, which again the strategy document does not really talk about. For example, we have called for the immediate enactment of a law to prevent defendants having the right to cross-examine directly the victims of sexual and domestic abuse in civil cases. We know that the situation has changed in criminal cases, but the right still exists in civil cases. The Government have been promising this since 2015, but nothing has happened. A judge in the family court recently had to intervene to ask the questions because he would not allow a male respondent to cross-examine a victim regarding sexual allegations against him. Our judges should not be forced into that position; their job is to adjudicate and judge, not to get involved in the actual process. That was not a one-off case, because we know that these things are happening in reality. We need to deal with that urgently.

Another change that we need in the law—this was mentioned during the recent passage of the Voyeurism (Offences) (No. 2) Bill through this House—is the introduction of anonymity for victims of revenge porn. It is strange that victim anonymity is maintained for all other sexual offences but not for revenge porn. I do not think that the humiliation of that crime is any less distressing than it is for some of the sexual acts committed against people. I ask the Government to bring forward legislation to deal with that quickly. They will have our support 100%, so it should not take too long to get the provision in place.

We have talked about the experience of victims. I think that most people accept that introducing independent violence advocates is a must. We need to have them in place as soon as possible so that victims have a better journey through the criminal justice system and at least feel, irrespective of the result, that they have been respected, heard properly and listened to. The Victims' Commissioner for London recently said that, given the cuts to policing and to special support services, victims can be left feeling unsupported and exposed to further risks. That applies not just to victims but to witnesses. I know that the strategy contains specific provision relating to children who might have witnessed domestic abuse. That is laudable and we welcome it, but perhaps it should be extended to other witnesses who see such horrific offences.

I try to group victims and witnesses together, because in some respects they are integral and linked, and in many cases we are talking not just about the victims who have been directly assaulted. The Criminal Cases Review Commission, the body that deals with miscarriages of justice, which are just as important, has had its budget slashed by up to 70%, which means that it is now unable to review cases properly or in a timely manner. Families facing inquests into the deaths of relatives are currently not entitled to legal aid. Indeed, the family of PC Keith Palmer, who was tragically murdered in last year's Westminster attacks, had to seek representation pro bono in the recent inquest. It cannot be right that the state can be fully funded but ordinary individuals are not. There has to be equality of arms. Victims' families should, as a matter of right, be entitled to legal aid in inquests without having to go through all the hurdles. It should be an automatic entitlement. Councils, hospitals and Government bodies can afford the best legal brains in the country, but the poor victims' families have to go through all the hurdles to get legal aid. I think that they should be put on an equal footing.

I thought that I would leave the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority to the end of my speech, because my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) certainly explained it in detail. She is absolutely right because, as everybody knows, money will not heal or remove the suffering but it can be of assistance. The way in which the CICA operates really needs to change. That is not its fault—it follows the scheme, so the scheme has to be changed. I hope that the Minister will take on board the comments on that by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham.

While we welcome any improvement to the current system, I would ask the Minister to address the issue of an independent domestic violence advocate, the provision for victims and witnesses in court and the need to properly fund our prosecuting authority and increase police numbers. Nothing is worse than having a case dismissed because the prosecution has not been able to get the evidence together. We know that the number of prosecutors has fallen, as has the number of caseworkers who put the cases together. The police are under the same pressures. They collate the original evidence, but many of their civilian staff, who put the case paperwork together, have also been cut. That issue needs to be addressed and those organisations properly funded. We must be able to have faith in our criminal justice system. As I have also said, the ability of defendants and respondents to cross-examine their victims directly must be sorted out immediately.

3.41 pm

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland):** Before I address all the wide-ranging and important points made in this debate, which is the start of the process that the strategy seeks to inform, may I pay personal tribute to the late Denzil Davies, whose death was reported this morning? He was the first Member of Parliament I ever met. He was my MP, and although I opposed him politically, he was a huge source of advice and encouragement to me. I probably would not be here without people like him, and I want to put on record my condolences to his family and his many friends. He was a Member of this House for 35 years and served on both Front Benches with distinction.

If the victims of crime are not heard, the interests of justice are not served. If they are not served, what meaning can the rule of law continue to have? If the rule of law is undermined, what hope do we have to continue to claim to be a civilised country? It is as fundamental as that and always has been to me. I spent 20 years or so in the criminal courts, meeting the victims of crime every day of my professional life. I have met thousands of people of all ages, from all backgrounds. I have admired their courage and I have tried to empathise with them when things have gone wrong. I have watched human experience unfold before my eyes, and I have done my best to support people who end up, through no choice of their own, in the criminal justice system.

I long ago came to the conclusion that no amount of individual good will or professionalism on the part of dedicated individuals in the system could replace a more systematic approach to the care of victims and witnesses. My former colleague on the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), is right to bring the two subjects together. They are indistinguishable in my mind, because there are many people who, while they have not been a direct victim,

*[The Solicitor General]*

will have witnessed some appalling events and have to live with the consequences, as well as go through the ordeal of having to give evidence.

What does it mean for a victim to seek and obtain justice? Obviously, the outcome of a criminal case is important. Rightly, we have independent judges and juries who make those decisions every day of the working week. Putting that to one side, however, I think that what it means for victims is not having to reinvent the wheel every time they come into contact with the various agencies that are responsible for the criminal justice service: not having to repeat their stories, their needs and the specific support to which they are entitled. As Members have rightly pointed out today, it also means that the authorities do not talk in jargon, but, in the words of a member of the victim liaison unit at the Crown Prosecution Service office in Yorkshire and Humberside, “speak in human being”.

I could not have put it better than that member of the team in Leeds whose job is to write letters, day in day out, to victims of crime. I pay tribute to the team’s work: they provide a particularly good example of how to do that. We in the House, who deal with thousands of letters every week, perhaps find letter-writing run of the mill, but to a victim of crime, receiving a letter from someone in authority in the CPS or the police is a significant moment. We really must do better, and get it right. I am glad to note that the CPS is redoubling its efforts, working across England and Wales to improve that vital process.

At the beginning of the debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), spoke about the seamless support that victims and witnesses deserve. That, in two words, encompasses the approach set out in the Government’s strategy. In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) talked about the sentencing process. Again, I think that the need for the authorities to make their position clear and understandable at the right time has never been more important.

As part of my role as Solicitor General, I often conduct “unduly lenient” sentence reviews, appearing as an advocate for the Government in the Court of Appeal, so I continue to meet the victims of what are often very serious crimes, and I can tell from their faces that the process continues to be overwhelming for them. It is sometimes very difficult to explain a situation that may seem straightforward to me, but for them is still difficult to process. If we are to get this right, we need to understand that time and space are often needed for it to be done properly. That ties in with the importance of the written letter and the explanation that is given to victims in the aftermath of a conviction, a sentence or, indeed, an acquittal. I pay tribute to the groups in the third sector that do so much advocacy for victims and their families in such circumstances.

I will never forget meeting the mother of a murdered child, whose then partner—not the child’s father—had perpetrated the most appalling injuries on that defenceless boy. I will never forget the—I will not say “gratitude”, but the relief that I could see she felt that a higher degree of justice had been done when the sentence was successfully varied by the Court of Appeal. It will never

leave me, and I am sure that many other Members on both sides of the House will have had the same experience. I think that such experiences are particularly powerful when one is in the court environment, at the coalface, seeing them for oneself. That is why I think it so important for the Law Officers to continue to conduct cases in person so that they can really get a sense of what is going on and can understand and hold on to that vital of experience with the victims of crime.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) understandably pressed us to proceed more speedily with the introduction of a victims law. She rightly said that we need to get the statutory duties right; we need to get them embedded, and we need to provide that systematic approach. We have committed in our strategy to consult upon the introduction of such a law, but it is not just about rights, important though they are; it is also about getting the statutory duties that have to underpin this absolutely right. Far too often, our experience here in this House—I think the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) might agree with me on this—is that we have gone ahead and passed legislation with the best of intentions, and then found that there has been a more than embarrassing, indeed a worrying, gap between the commencement of that legislation and its proper implementation. If we were to go down that road, we would fail victims badly, because we would raise expectations and then let them down. That is why we need to get this legislation absolutely right, but in the meantime we are not just sitting on our hands: we have published a strategy that commits to action here and now. Taking on board the constructive points the hon. Lady made, I think this is the best approach for victims and the interests of justice.

The hon. Lady asked a number of questions, and I will do my best to deal with as many of them as possible. The existing code has a statutory underpinning anyway, and the parliamentary ombudsman has a role in looking at and reporting on any maladministration, and we will of course, importantly, be looking at how to monitor future performance. The information that we can glean from the work of PCCs across the country about compliance with that code will help us to understand better where things are going wrong, and we expect that information to increase as the strategy is rolled out. That will help inform the important process leading up to the introduction of legislation.

The hon. Lady made a point about the cross-examination of victims of sexual offences—what we might call the section 41 point, in reference to the measure in the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 that introduced the restriction in question—and she mentioned the work of the former Solicitor General, now PCC for Northumbria, Dame Vera Baird, and the points made by other Members about this. We looked closely at the use of section 41 about a year ago, because we were very concerned about Dame Vera’s observations. We keep the matter under review, but we looked at about 300 cases and we found that, happily, evidence of the misuse or non-use of section 41 was sparing. In 92% of cases analysed by the CPS, we found no evidence of the improper use of sexual history in a way that would totally defeat the purposes of the legislation.

It is important, however, that we stamp out bad practice and that we train advocates and judges as fully as possible to put up the red light immediately when

inappropriate cross-examination is embarked upon, and I am glad to say that all criminal advocates and barristers are now getting training in dealing with sexual offences, in terms not just of cross-examination but of understanding fully the important procedures that have existed now for the better part of 20 years. Without being too anecdotal, I have had professional experience of prosecuting and defending in sexual cases both before and after section 41, and I remember the sea change that took place as a result of its introduction and how alert I certainly was, and other professionals were, to making sure that if applications were to be made that was done in writing before the trial, so that, importantly, complainants and victims were not taken by surprise, which is probably one of the worst things we can imagine: there someone is in court giving evidence about their statement when suddenly they find that wholly extraneous matters irrelevant to the issues in the case are being brought up. It must not happen.

**Sarah Champion:** I wonder whether the Minister will be kind enough to look into the evidence I have on child victims of sexual assault, because I think he might be quite shocked by the data I discovered.

**The Solicitor General:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and I would be very interested in that. Section 41 is widely framed; it involves not only adult complainants, and it embraces all types of sexual offence, not just rape, important though that is. I would be very interested to hear more about that evidence. She and I have worked together on many Bill Committees as Back Benchers, and I look forward to hearing more information from her.

Spousal rights were raised, as were the terrible circumstances in which someone might have murdered or tried unlawfully to kill their spouse. I understand that the hon. Member for Ashfield raised this point in Justice questions this week, and that the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), has undertaken to meet her to discuss it. I reiterate my hon. and learned Friend's words, because the hon. Lady has raised this matter quite properly in the context of this debate. She also raised the issue of sentence changes to the maximum term for perpetrators of the offence of causing death by dangerous driving. We have committed to doing that as soon as parliamentary time allows. I can tell her that I am anxiously looking at a number of unduly lenient cases involving that type of offence and that I get frustrated by the 14-year maximum. I know that it causes judges real sentencing issues when it comes to reflecting the full gravity of the offence, particularly when more than one death has occurred as a result of appalling driving. That point is well made, and we hear it loud and clear.

The debate moved on in a helpful and important way when we heard the input from constituency Members. They referred to their own experiences in their constituencies, and echoed some of the analysis that we can see in the strategy. My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) made those points very well in his speech. He reminded us of how far we have come in terms of changing the law to respond to the needs of modern crime—in particular, stalking and harassment. The hon. Member for Rotherham and I have worked on those issues in the past. I had the

honour as a Minister of bringing into law the offence of coercive control, having campaigned for it as a Back Bencher. In the past year, we saw about 4,000 such cases, which equates to 4,000 victims of criminality who would not have had a voice two or three years ago. I constantly ask my local senior police officers about their experience of rolling out and using that new offence, and I am glad to say that there is an increasing understanding of its complexities.

Clare's law was also mentioned. It is among the many key changes that the Government have introduced to safeguard and protect those who have either been the victims of crime or are at risk. I was particularly proud of our decision to place domestic homicide reviews on a statutory footing, bringing into force legislation that had been passed under the previous Government.

I have omitted to mention pre-trial counselling, to which the hon. Member for Rotherham and others have referred. There is a legitimate question about ensuring that the evidence of victims and witnesses is preserved and protected in a way that minimises the risk of its being undermined in cross-examination, but plenty of professionals out there have the training and understanding to know that. Where we have suitably qualified psychiatrists or other mental health professionals, there should in my view be no bar to the sort of general counselling help that would be of real value to people who are experiencing some form of trauma as a result of what has happened to them. With those safeguards, I am sure that more can be done to support victims, who often have to wait too long between the offence and the trial or the sentencing process.

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) drew our attention at length to the Scottish experience, as he is wont to do, and I make no criticism of him for that. He knows from previous answers that I have given to him and his colleagues that I am always alive to and interested in the Scottish experience. Indeed, history teaches us that many of the innovations brought in via the Scottish criminal justice system have been adapted here in England and Wales, and I see no reason for that to stop. That is why his contribution was particularly valuable today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) spoke with some force about his local experiences and the work being done by people such as the Donovans, who are an inspiration to many. His speech saw the welcome introduction of the theme of restorative justice, another issue in which I have taken a long and deep interest. Restorative justice must be victim led, and there are various scenarios where it works most powerfully.

Having spoken to victims who have availed themselves of face-to-face meetings with perpetrators, often in a prison setting, I know that the sense not just of closure, but of regaining control that victims can get is a powerful factor. I was glad that the coalition Government placed restorative justice on a firmer statutory footing in previous legislation, because we see it at all levels, particularly in youth offending, where it can be extremely powerful to bring a young offender face to face with their victim. As long as restorative justice is led by the victim—it is not a substitute for more appropriate action where necessary—then it is a valuable tool.

The hon. Member for Rotherham made an important speech that dealt in particular with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. She knows that the Government

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have committed to a review of the scheme; we have already committed to an important change to the “under the same roof” rule, which will be brought into force as soon as is practicable. She made other points about the position that people, particularly young people, will often be put into when it comes to consent.

The hon. Lady and I worked on the Serious Crime Act 2015 when it was in Committee, where we removed any suggestion that children were somehow impliedly consenting to sexual conduct when they were under the age of 16. If she remembers, we removed phrases such as “child prostitute” from the law. We tried in a constructive way to reset the clock when it comes to the protection of children, and let me be absolutely clear that victims who have been groomed should never be treated as if they consented. Let that message go out loud and clear to whoever needs to hear it. I am glad to say that the CICA has revised its staff guidance. That was done with engagement with the third sector, so I am interested to know of any instances where that concept of implied consent is somehow being reintroduced into the process when Parliament made it clear that it has no place in criminal law.

The hon. Lady also made other important points about unspent criminal convictions. Again, that issue must never be the subject of generalisation, and CICA claims officers should take into account the reasons for criminal behaviour when considering unspent convictions that do not result in a custodial sentence or community order. In other words, look at the person, not just the lines on a page. While it would be wrong of me to seek to intervene in individual cases—the CICA is independent—this is a useful opportunity for us to make such important points.

I get the point about time limits, and I have seen for myself the delay that understandably means that many victims of sexual offences will not come forward at the first opportunity. We are now light years away from the time when witnesses were asked such questions in court. People understand how difficult it is to come forward. We know that many victims often blame themselves for what happened, quite unfairly, and that this is about people doing things in their own time. Again, there is discretion when it comes to applications, but I have heard the point loud and clear today, and I am sure that that will help to inform the review.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) rightly talked about the impact of domestic violence on children, who often witness it or even hear it in the home. We must not forget the effect of the sheer force of noise on young people. I am glad to note that courts up and down the country will treat that as a significant aggravating factor when it comes to sentencing perpetrators of domestic abuse. The scars might not be physical, but they remain for a long time, if not forever, in many cases.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) made some important points about cases of which she has had experience and, again, made the point that the need to improve practice now was imperative. Understandably, the debate has expanded somewhat from just the criminal justice process, but it is right to say that any victims legislation will apply to the victims of crime. That criminality can extend to major disasters,

whether it is Grenfell or Hillsborough, and I am not going to prejudge the outcome of any proceedings, as they might well arguably be crimes themselves, although we will have to wait to see the outcome of any procedures. I take her point about the need for urgency, which is why the strategy does more than fill the gap. It brings together years of work and, importantly, looks to the future in a way that we can get to grips with now.

The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) rightly reminded us of an aspect of the debate that we have not touched on today, which is to do with what I call hate crime. He quite properly reminded us of the appalling incident outside Parliament. He knows that I and others have supported the respect the turban campaign, and I have supported it in this place and in my local gurdwara in Swindon as well. He is right that we need to take these things seriously lest they take hold in a way that will reflect poorly on our society. Again, he mentioned stalking, harassment and sexual offences in that context. He was absolutely right to do that. He also mentioned the victim’s right of review and I can assure him that it already exists so when the CPS has a decision with which a particular complainant is not happy, they can ask for that to be reviewed. That is happening now, and in a number of important cases it is already there. Can I reassure him that although he then got on his soapbox a bit—and I am sure that he will forgive me for saying that—a lot of the recommendations made by the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and others are things that we have already done or that we are doing via the strategy? As DPP, the right hon. and learned Gentleman took through massive changes to the CPS that I believe resulted in a more efficient service that still delivers a very high degree of justice for thousands of people year in, year out.

The hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) brought her knowledge and experience to the debate. In particular, she talked about the victim personal statement, and in a moving way. I know that she did not intend to be moved in that way, but it moved us. More importantly, it informed us. The victim personal statement is a vital opportunity not just for the victim to have their voice but for the court to be able fully to understand the impact on them. That is why I am particularly enthused by the proposals to use bodyworn videos to capture not just what is said but the way in which it is said and the sense that the victim statement should be a living document.

At the moment, there are sometimes one, two or three versions of the VPS designed to update the court. Asking the victim to make a statement again and again is not necessarily the best way to support them, so the concept of a living VPS would really help. Again, I am pleased with the work done by the CPS to co-ordinate and synthesise the increased use of VPSs across the service—it has to increase. In particular, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood, has dealt with his commitment and our commitment to review the Parole Board process, and the hon. Lady’s comments have considerably informed that debate. We are recruiting intermediaries, and Members have seen our commitment to that. We need to make sure that when we use intermediaries, they are genuinely for the purpose of assisting the victim to give their evidence. I have used them myself in cases and achieved

results that I would not have dreamt of without them, so I understand and get it. A major recruitment process is ongoing.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) brought the experience of Northern Ireland as a welcome intervention into this debate. He talked about the wooden spoon, which, in rugby parlance, Ireland have won more than Wales. I do not think I had better dwell any further on his experience of corporal punishment. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North mentioned Scotland, who are the doyenne of the wooden spoon, although they are getting better. I am talking about rugby union, Mr Deputy Speaker, which I know is a discipline you do not care for that much.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** I only know the real game of rugby.

**The Solicitor General:** That is an entirely different debate. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, we have discussed it at length and heatedly in the past.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Strangford for having carefully read the strategy and for helping to outline some of the important detail it contains. It is not just about warm words; it contains a lot of substance and, in particular, it outlines the use of best practice by a number of PCCs and other local services that we want to roll out further. The document is well written, accessible and can be read by a member of the public; it is written in “human being”, to coin my own phrase. That is why it is particularly valuable and important at this time.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the new Minister for suicide prevention. I know she will want to work with both me and colleagues in the Ministry of Justice to make sure that we understand the position of victims. There have been some cases where, as a result of their experiences, we have lost them. A very important point was made.

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) raised the point about training. Frontline staff, whoever they are, need training, because they will often be involved in the victim’s only encounter with the criminal justice system. Every member of the team, be they a barrister, a legal executive or someone at the end of a phone, needs to understand the importance of our strategy, and how properly to support victims and witnesses. I have seen some really good practice in my experience both as a Member of Parliament and as a practitioner, and again this is echoed in the strategy.

In particular, the right hon. Gentleman asked about support for families bereaved by the tragedy of a homicide abroad. When a British person dies overseas, Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff are able to provide advice on how to repatriate their loved one and to support Her Majesty’s coroner if an inquest is heard in England or Wales. All consular officers receive mandatory training on how to support families bereaved overseas. We are currently completing a new homicide service, which will commence in April next year, so that families bereaved by homicides abroad will be entitled to the same support as those who are bereaved by homicide here in England and Wales. That is a vital commitment, and I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will welcome it.

My civil servants worked overtime to prepare a draft speech for me, but because there has been so much substance in this debate, I have not needed it. I realise that all good things must come to an end, but, in all seriousness, this debate has been a very important part in the process of developing our strategy. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for taking part, and I commend the victims strategy to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Victims Strategy.

## Rail Services into Liverpool Street Station

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jeremy Quin.)*

4.14 pm

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I asked for this Adjournment debate because my constituents are increasingly angry about the poor quality of service that they receive on the Abellio Greater Anglia-run line from Southend Victoria into Liverpool Street station. As the Minister is about to discover, after several years of dealing with this issue, I, too, am now angry on their behalf. I hope to demonstrate why Abellio provides such an unsatisfactory service to my constituents and suggest some ways forward.

Abellio Greater Anglia, which is part-Dutch and part-Japanese owned, has been providing the rail service on the Liverpool Street line for a number of years, and last year it won the competition to continue to run the franchise for another seven years. Unfortunately, it does not provide an efficient service. The latest data shows that more than one in every 10 Abellio trains arrives at its destination late, and the rolling stock is old, lacks air conditioning and suffers from a whole range of maintenance problems, meaning that trains are often cancelled or, at the very least, have carriages missing. Trains with carriages missing are often referred to in the industry as short trains. In simple terms, they normally have 12 carriages, but often, even in peak periods when capacity is most important, they are down to eight carriages, or even worse. That leads to overcrowding on the remaining carriages.

It is particularly galling for my constituents that for the past two years or so they have suffered regular disruption to their services on many weekends, and while travelling home late on certain weekday evenings, because of engineering works being carried out to renew overhead wires on the Liverpool Street to Southend line. On many weekends, bus replacement services have been required to help to transport commuters into London and back again, and the pattern has been repeated on weekday evenings. In addition, there is an unfortunate pattern of late trains being cancelled on weekday evenings. One evening a few weeks ago, when I was coming home late, I challenged one of the Abellio Greater Anglia customer service staff to explain why, yet again, a train had been cancelled. He said to me, "Sir, it's because the company doesn't want to pay the fines if the trains are late, so they prefer to cancel." The company's management has contested this point with me, but if even the company's own frontline staff believe that that is what is going on, what kind of message does that send to frustrated customers?

Despite the frequent disruption to the service, Abellio has consistently refused to give any discount to commuters to acknowledge the inconvenience that they have suffered when travelling on the line. As a result, a number of commuters have established a Facebook group called "I travel with Greater Anglia...". For the Minister's edification, here is just a sample of a few comments that have appeared on the group in recent weeks. First, the "07.23 Southend to LST turned up at Wickford with only 8 coaches. Did it lose some on the way given it wasn't listed in the app or the board?!"

Secondly:

"Surely this group should be called 'I \*TRY TO\* travel with "Greater" Anglia?"

Thirdly:

"Thinking of changing the group's name to 'I travel with Greater Anglia rail replacement bus' after today's shower of a service".

Finally:

"After announcing a 12 coach service only 8 turn up. These muppets can't even get the announcements right!"

Customer satisfaction surveys carried out by the consumer organisation Which? show that in 2017 Abellio Greater Anglia ranked 20th out of 28 for commuter service, with a score of 45%, compared with a top score of 64%, and for off-peak leisure services it ranked 18th out of 28, with a customer score of 55%, compared with a top score of 70%. These dismal scores clearly show that Abellio customers, particularly its commuters, are very unhappy with the service that they receive from Abellio Greater Anglia.

I had some experience of this service myself recently while travelling home in the evening peak. I had taken the tube from Westminster to Stratford station and when I got to Stratford, passengers were already six deep on the platform because the previous train had been cancelled. The next train that pulled in heading towards Southend was half empty and stopped at the platform because there was a red signal. When passengers attempted to board the train, they were stopped by Abellio platform staff who insisted that this was not a scheduled stop and therefore people should not be allowed to board. This led to a great deal of frustration on the platform—that is putting it politely—which I witnessed myself. Despite this, the train doors remained closed while the train sat on the platform for several minutes and then eventually pulled away still half empty and still with passengers six deep on the platform. There was a degree of Anglo Saxon language on the platform at this point, though I hasten to say not from me.

The next train to come in, which was some 20 minutes delayed, was already nearly full and therefore when passengers were allowed to get on this train—because this was a scheduled stop—they were packed like sardines for most of the way home. This one anecdote shows the lack of common sense that is applied by Abellio's management to the running of their railway.

In fairness, new modern rolling stock is to be introduced on the line from summer 2019. However, brand new trains are useful to the customer only if they are able to leave the depot to run on the line. They are no good to anybody, despite air conditioning, wi-fi and all the bells and whistles, if they are still stuck in the depot, because, yet again, the line is closed off, because, yet again, there are engineering works and customers have to take buses instead.

I recently held a meeting at the Conservative party conference with the senior management of Abellio to discuss these issues—I have been discussing those issues with them for three years. At that meeting, they explained to me that the engineering works that have caused so much disruption and frustration were now due to be extended from the current end date of late 2019-early 2020 to May 2021. That is another three years on top of the two years that we have already had. I pleaded with the management at least to offer my commuters, who pay £5,000 for a standard class season ticket from Rayleigh to Liverpool Street and back, some discount when they renew their tickets in January to acknowledge all the inconvenience that they have had to endure. As I

put it to them, “Give them at least something back to show that you share their pain.” However, the company flatly refused to countenance that, partly, I believe, because it is highly geared and has extremely ambitious financial targets to meet.

I have, therefore, become completely exasperated by the company. It is now running a glorified bus service loosely disguised as a railway and my constituents have absolutely had enough of it. I have to tell the Minister that I have now completely lost confidence in the management of Abellio Greater Anglia, which seems to regard my constituents as an entirely captive market who can be provided with a shoddy service while continuing to increase their fares year on year. I have, therefore, come to the reluctant conclusion that the management are incapable of running the company properly and I am calling on Mr Jamie Burles, the managing director of Abellio Greater Anglia, to resign. In fairness to myself, I did tell him at the Conservative party conference last week that I would do that, and it is probably fair to say that he was not best pleased. I believe that only with new and reinvigorated management will the company improve its performance and begin to respect its customers as it should have been doing in the first place.

I also—and I told him this too—intend to send a copy of the *Hansard* of this debate to each one of Abellio’s corporate managers on its corporate board in the Netherlands, so that they are aware of what English Members of Parliament think of their railway company.

This brings me to Network Rail, which runs the track and infrastructure on the Liverpool Street line. As a constituency MP, I have had many years’ experience of dealing with Network Rail and, indeed, Railtrack previously. I have often found Network Rail to be bureaucratic, very slow moving and unresponsive. Never is this more so than with the re-wiring project, which it now wants to extend to May 2021, thus taking nearly five years to replace the overhead wires for some 30 miles of track. This is an utterly pathetic performance and is simply unacceptable. We are not trying to build a railway through the Himalayas and we managed to put a man on the moon in 1969, so why does it take five years to run a new wire between a series of gantries above a railway line? I believe that Network Rail has simply not put anything like enough resource into this project. It has had no sense of urgency whatever, and has done it in a piecemeal and underinvested fashion. That is why it has taken so very, very long.

One of the great problems with Network Rail is that it is not customer facing. It is the train operating companies that levy the ticket prices. Network Rail thus has no need whatever to be responsive to the travelling public. The organisation is large, bloated, bureaucratic and inefficient, and is providing an extremely poor service to my constituents. Moreover, the new chief executive of Network Rail, Mr Andrew Haines, is now being paid film star wages—many multiples of that which the Prime Minister receives—in order to run a massive, incompetent, failing bureaucracy.

Network Rail is in many ways reminiscent of a nationalised industry in the 1970s, when it used to take six months to get a new telephone installed by the old General Post Office. I was assured at a briefing dinner in the House of Commons several years ago that there would not need to be track closures and rail replacement buses when all this engineering work was undertaken on

the line because Network Rail would use what is known as single track operation so that they could continue to run trains even at the weekends. This has proved to be completely untrue. I no longer have any faith whatever in the senior management of Network Rail, and as a result of my experience of dealing with them as a constituency MP over many years, I would not trust them with a Meccano set.

This brings me on to the disaster that was the introduction of the new timetable on much of our railway network several months ago, although—mercifully for my constituents—not on our line. I must say that I have some sympathy for the Secretary of State for Transport, who, prior to the introduction of the new timetable, did exactly what I would have done as a Minister. He called a meeting of senior executives of the railway industry, including Network Rail. Having gathered them together, he asked them if everything was in good order for the launch of the new timetable in a few weeks’ time. Unfortunately, as I understand it, not one of those highly paid executives had the moral courage to put their hand up at that meeting and admit that there were going to be serious problems. They sat there and did not tell anyone. This complete lack of professionalism meant that the Department was led to believe that the new timetable would be introduced successfully. After all, it had brought the heads of the industry—or their senior executives—in and asked them, and no one had said anything to the contrary. How can anyone run an industry if it is controlled by people like that?

Partly as a result of that fiasco, the Government introduced the rail review, on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made a statement earlier this afternoon. So in what I hope is a timely intervention, I would like the Rail Minister to regard my speech tonight as a submission to that review. I hope that I have been quick off the blocks.

For the avoidance of doubt, I do not believe that renationalising the railways is the answer. In the 1980s and 1990s, before I was a Member of Parliament, I often commuted on the Southend to London Fenchurch Street line, which runs parallel to the Liverpool street line. It was run by the old British Rail and was widely known as the misery line. The clue is in the name. It had appalling punctuality, extremely old slam-door trains and frequent cancellations of services. I remember one winter going down to Laindon station from which I used to commute at about 8 am to catch the 8.05. It was a dreary, wet, dripping British winter Monday morning and the passengers were about six deep on the platform, which told me straight away that something was up.

Over the tannoy came an announcement that I have always remembered. The announcer said, “British Rail wish to apologise to customers on platform 1 who are waiting for the 8.05 service to London Fenchurch Street. This has been cancelled due to a points failure in the Shoeburyness depot area.” A great sigh went up along the platform. Then the announcer said, “Once again British Rail wish to apologise.” Then he paused and said, “Look, it is a Monday morning and we’ve cocked it up as usual. For what it’s worth, I’m really sorry.” There was a stunned silence on the platform, which was then followed by a large round of applause, because people could not think what else to do. That is my memory of the old British Rail, and I certainly do not want to go back to that.

[Mr Mark Francois]

To illustrate my point further, today the Fenchurch Street line, which is run by C2C, is one of the most successful and punctual lines in the country, with modern, comfortable, air-conditioned, wi-fi enabled trains. Renationalising the railways would put the network at the mercy of the Treasury every year, and I believe would lead to a lack of investment and inefficiency over time. Network Rail today shows us what a nationalised railway industry would be like, and as I think it is already a failure, I do not believe that nationalisation is the answer.

I think the better way would be to reunify train and track and recreate the old regional railway companies such as Great Eastern and Great Western, but crucially with both the trains and the rail infrastructure under one combined management as one company, so that the whole could be run as a properly integrated business. I believe that that would be far superior to the current unsatisfactory arrangements, in which lines of responsibility are unclear, everyone blames everyone else when something goes wrong, and there is obviously a clear lack of what the military would call command and control.

In summary, I am utterly exasperated about the lack of customer care from Abellio Greater Anglia, and I believe that the company needs new management and a fresh start. It must learn to respect its customers rather than treating them as cattle. I also remain highly critical of Network Rail, which I believe is highly bureaucratic and inefficient and is failing the travelling public. As a result, I believe Network Rail should be broken up and that train and track should be reunified in a series of regional railway companies as an outcome of the rail review. Other than that, I think everything is going swimmingly and I look forward with genuine interest on behalf of my constituents to the Minister's reply.

4.34 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson):** I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) on securing the debate and giving us the opportunity to discuss train services into Liverpool Street. He has made a powerful and hard-hitting case on behalf of his constituents. It is a shame that there were not more people in the Chamber to hear it, but I know that he has a big social media following, not least from those of his constituents who are on the "I travel with Greater Anglia" Facebook page and its offshoots.

I would like to provide some information about the engineering works that have been taking place on the line to Southend, which, as we have heard, have clearly had a very negative impact on passengers in my right hon. Friend's constituency. I will also touch on the important issues of fares and compensation, which he mentioned, and provide an update on the new trains that Greater Anglia has ordered and that are currently being built.

I recognise how important it is for my right hon. Friend's constituents to have high-quality and reliable train services, so that they can get to work and go about their lives in a way that allows them to depend on the critical part of our national infrastructure that the railways represent. We are working closely as a Department with Network Rail and the train companies to drive

down delays and cancellations, and we will support Network Rail and the wider industry in delivering significant improvements to the experience that passengers have of our railways.

The Department is following closely the significant upgrade project that Network Rail is currently delivering to replace the overhead line wire and equipment between Liverpool Street, Chelmsford and Southend Victoria. That, as my right hon. Friend knows, is a £46 million investment in our rail network. It started in 2014 and is due to be completed in 2020. It involves more than 500 structures being replaced and the installation of 128 km of overhead wire, and it is much needed. As he will know, the wiring system on his stretch of track was installed in the 1950s, nearly 70 years ago, and is in dire need of replacement. The current equipment is old, unreliable and prone to failure, and it is subject to sagging in hot temperatures. In recent years, there have been a number of highly disruptive de-wirements, as they are known, and more recently Network Rail has understandably had to impose speed restrictions in hot conditions as a result. Disruption caused by the failure of equipment leads to cancellations and delays, which impact the quality of service that passengers experience.

To minimise the overall time taken to complete that much-needed upgrade scheme, which would be a number of years longer if Network Rail only used weekends for the work, there have been some extensive periods of mid-week late evening blockades, with bus replacement services after 8.30 pm. Passenger numbers are generally lower during that period, as it is outside the conventional evening peak, so closing the line at that time helps to minimise overall passenger disruption.

I am aware that Greater Anglia has asked Network Rail to formally review its programme, to try to reduce the impact of that evening mid-week possession programme. It may be possible to focus the works more on weekends, but the decision on how best to manage that needs to be thought through carefully by both Network Rail and Greater Anglia. I understand that Network Rail and Greater Anglia are working together to get these works completed as soon as possible, with a view to having the works completed by early 2020 at the latest. In response to my right hon. Friend's points, we expect Network Rail to commit enough resources to complete these works as soon as reasonably practicable. It has informed the Department that it now has a stretch target to complete the works by the end of 2019.

While negotiations for track access are ongoing, it is important to note that, whatever the outcome, the railway will only ever be closed for a set amount of time in total, and the question under discussion is largely one of how that time is spread out—the trade-off being greater passenger disruption if it is compressed.

**Mr Francois:** I thank my hon. Friend for his clear exposition. My constituents are not unreasonable people—they live in the real world. They know that the overhead work has to be done and that the infrastructure has to be upgraded. They accept that, but it is taking far too long. The evening possessions give Network Rail very little time on the track, so why not put far more resources in and put more men and women on the job during the weekend possessions and get it done quicker? That is what my constituents and I want.



**Joseph Johnson:** That is an entirely reasonable point of view. Network Rail has assured the Department that it is putting in the resources to get the job done as soon as is reasonably practicable, but on the back of the powerful points and the strong case my right hon. Friend has made on behalf of his constituents, I will write to Network Rail again to ensure that it is resourcing the project as it deserves.

I am aware that, as my right hon. Friend said, he has met Jamie Burles, the managing director of Greater Anglia, and asked that customers be given compensation in acknowledgement of the disruption that passengers have faced. I understand that Greater Anglia is now looking at whether there is a good-will gesture that might be practical, focusing in particular on those who have been affected by the adverse impact of the engineering works. Where customers are delayed outside the engineering works, Delay Repay compensation will of course apply as usual.

Officials from the Department are working with the operator, Greater Anglia, to see whether there is an affordable way to extend the compensation scheme so that it applies for a 15-minute delay rather than from the current 30-minute delay threshold. My right hon. Friend mentioned the Secretary of State's statement earlier today, to which I am sure he listened carefully, in which the Secretary of State said that he wants Delay Repay 15 to be introduced in 2019—next year—on Greater Anglia. My right hon. Friend can take considerable credit for that development, and I hope that he will welcome it on behalf of his constituents.

The Government set the maximum amount by which regulated fares can rise. Train operators can choose to raise their fares by a lower amount, and there is no requirement for them always to use the maximum amount. We recognise the need to move away from RPI towards CPI, and the Secretary of State has written to the rail trade unions asking for their understanding and co-operation with this.

**Mr Francois:** What my hon. Friend says about the rate of fare increases is important. When I put precisely that point to Abellio, stating my understanding that, according to the RPI formula, the company can raise fares up to that limit but does not have to raise them to the limit if it does not want to, Abellio told me that, basically because of its contract and franchise agreement, it had no choice. I am not sure that is correct. Can my hon. Friend confirm that Abellio could levy a lower increase if it wanted?

**Joseph Johnson:** Yes, absolutely. I can confirm that the Government cap regulated fares, which account for about two thirds of fares on our railways, and it is up to the operator where to set fares below that cap.

The benefits of the franchise changes coming into place are part of a broad programme of benefits to franchises across the country. On the Greater Anglia

network, the entire fleet of trains will be replaced by 2020, as my right hon. Friend mentioned, and an extensive programme of fleet refurbishment is under way. Greater Anglia has on order over 1,000 new carriages, and manufacturing and construction of the new carriages by Stadler and Bombardier in Derby is now well under way. The new trains will start to be rolled out across the network from the middle of next year and the full roll-out should be completed by the end of 2020. The new state-of-the-art trains will provide many more seats that are much needed on those busy services, and the modern trains will also provide an improved travelling environment with wi-fi, air conditioning and power sockets. The new trains will be more efficient, have faster acceleration and provide better customer information.

Although those trains are coming down the line in the future, I am clear that the current performance of Network Rail and Greater Anglia needs to improve. I recognise the strong points made by my right hon. Friend about the instances of poor performance he has experienced and those that his constituents have relayed to him through casework and in conversations. There have been a number of regrettable infrastructure and train failures over the summer, but it is fair to say that performance has been better more recently. The public performance measure for Greater Anglia stands at 89.3% for the four-week period to 18 September, which is only fractionally below its franchise target of about 91.3% for that period. Clearly, there is room for improvement, and the Department will monitor its progress in meeting public performance targets over the coming weeks.

In conclusion, I again thank my right hon. Friend for the opportunity to discuss services to Liverpool Street, and I appreciate the frustration that he and his constituents have been experiencing. Once the works are complete, we expect performance to improve on that part of the network, resulting in fewer cancellations and delays.

**Mr Francois:** May I intervene one last time to thank the Minister for what I regard as a considered and thoughtful reply? He has clearly listened to what I was saying, and I am delighted that he will write to Network Rail about providing more resources. I would, of course, be fascinated to see a copy of the reply, which I hope can be managed. The Minister gets it. I am really pleased that he gets it, and I look forward to working with him to try to make this difficult situation better. I am grateful.

**Joseph Johnson:** I have little more to add other than that we will be following up this issue closely with Network Rail and the train operators to ensure that my right hon. Friend gets the experience that he wants for his constituents on this important stretch of our network.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.47 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

*Thursday 11 October 2018*

[DAVID HANSON *in the Chair*]

## BACKBENCH BUSINESS

### Freeports

1.30 pm

**Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I beg to move,

This this House has considered the establishment of freeports in the UK.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I thank the Backbench Business Committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), for granting this timely debate, and the many supporters who helped to secure it, in particular the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field). He is a great champion of both Brexit and the north of England, and is held in the highest regard on both sides of the House. He has asked me to pass on his apologies today; he is unfortunately detained on Merseyside.

What is the issue that unites us, and what is a freeport? At its simplest, a freeport is an area that is physically within a country but legally outside it for customs purposes. Consequently, goods that enter a freeport do not incur import duty. Instead, import duty is paid only if and when goods pass from the freeport into the domestic economy. That offers a number of advantages, as, for example, goods can be imported, processed and then re-exported without incurring any duty. That incentivises international businesses to use the freeport as part of their supply chain, thereby stimulating domestic manufacturing and creating jobs in the process. The deferral of duty also enables goods to be stored or processed in the freeport before entering the domestic economy. That allows businesses to better control their cash flow and, again, encourages domestic manufacturing, as import tariffs on processed goods are often less than those on the individual component parts.

In addition to the benefits accrued through duty-free status, freeports often offer their users a number of additional advantages, including tax reliefs and a simplified regulatory environment. It is important to stress that there is no one model of freeport. All freeports are different in the mix of advantages that they offer and the physical form that they take—I think we will hear from colleagues today about issues ranging from seaports to airports. The debate, therefore, is about not only whether the UK should establish freeports, but what form they should take. I will begin, however, by briefly describing the case for freeports in general.

Freeports are not a new idea; indeed, approximately 3,500 freeports are now operating in more than 135 countries. The UK is unusual in that we have no operational freeports. If we are to compete seriously in the global trading system once we leave the EU, that has to change, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) pointed out in his excellent paper for the Centre for Policy Studies.

Wherever freeports have been implemented properly around the world they have had that effect. Just look at how quickly and impressively the Jebel Ali free zone in the United Arab Emirates has transformed Dubai. In the space of a few decades, that free zone has brought unimaginable wealth to that country. The free zone alone now hosts 7,000 global companies, employs 145,000 people and accounts for around 40% of the UAE's total direct foreign investment.

Jebel Ali is the most unique and dramatic example, but freeports have demonstrated their worth in highly developed and mature economies as well. The growth in freeports in the US, for example, has outperformed the US economy as a whole. One report predicts that if freeports in the UK were as successful as those in the US, we would create an additional 86,000 jobs. There is every indication that freeports in the UK would be just as successful as those around the world—perhaps even more so, given our excellent links with the United States, Europe and the Commonwealth.

A report commissioned from Mace Group by my fellow Conservative, Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen, looked at what a programme of supercharged freeports in the north of England might mean for our economy. It found that such a programme, once established, would boost UK trade by nearly £12 billion a year, create 150,000 extra jobs across the north, including 17,500 in Tees and Hartlepool, and provide a boost to northern powerhouse GDP of £9 billion a year—equivalent to £1,500 a year for every household in the north.

Although the jobs created by freeports would extend to the service sector as well, the vast majority would be in manufacturing. That in itself would be another huge advantage for the UK economy. Although manufacturing as a share of our economy has declined from 32% of gross value added in 1970 to 10% today, it still accounts for 13% of business investment, 50% of UK exports and 70% of business research and development. It also creates high-paying jobs, with the average worker in manufacturing earning £3,400 more than those in the rest of the economy.

Increasing the size of our manufacturing sector is also central to boosting the stagnant levels of productivity that the Government have rightly identified as a key structural challenge for the UK economy. As the Government's industrial strategy White Paper points out:

“The productivity of the sector has increased four times faster than the rest of the economy”.

By boosting the share of manufacturing in the UK economy, freeports would have positive effects on productivity, wage levels, the current account deficit, investment, and research and development.

Although I would love to see freeports dotted around the entire UK coastline, like giant magnets pulling in container ships from all around the world, I also want to fly the flag particularly for Teesport, and I am delighted to see my friend the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) here to make that case. Situated immediately adjacent to the site of the former Sahaviriya Steel Industries steelworks—now the centre of the largest regeneration project anywhere in the UK—Teesport is undergoing huge investment to prepare it to rival the major ports in Europe. It handles more than 5,000 vessels each year and around 40 million tonnes of cargo, on an

[Mr Simon Clarke]

estate covering almost 800 acres. Teesport has all the qualities that will allow it to prosper as an international hub for trade and supply chain processing: deep water access that allows volumes to be maximised, the availability of extensive brownfield land surrounding the port, excellent transport links to the rest of the country, a ready supply of skilled workers, and a local economy that has so much unrealised potential.

For all the reasons that I have set out, I strongly believe that freeports could transform the economic growth and prosperity of the north-east, as well as the wider UK economy. However, as I have mentioned, freeports come in many forms, and it matters a great deal for the success of a freeport that it consists of the right features. Members may be aware that the UK has experimented with freeports once before. My researcher dredged out a wonderful report from the 1980s by the Adam Smith Institute, setting out the experiment that was launched in 1984, giving six ports around the UK freeport status: Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, Prestwick airport and Southampton. All those freeports, however, failed to achieve the success that we have witnessed in others around the world, because they did not offer anything like the advantages that could be acquired in many other freeports outside Europe. That was partly due to an uncharacteristic lack of ambition by the Thatcher Government, but mostly due to the regulatory constraints placed on them by the EU.

It is therefore crucial that, if and when we reintroduce freeports to the UK, we allow them the oxygen that they need to breathe and come to life. That is where I take issue with the Government's current position. In his reply to a written question from me earlier this week, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury emphasised that the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, which I am sure we all know well, already provides a legal basis for the designation of free zones, and will continue to do so following our departure from the EU.

I am a great admirer of the Minister, and I know that he is deeply committed to boosting our economy. I am also genuinely grateful for the supportive conversations that I have had with other Treasury Ministers about how we could aim to deliver a new generation of freeports. However, if we are not prepared to go further than we did in the 1980s, the results will be the same. During that first freeport experiment, Dr Eamonn Butler and Dr Madsen Pirie, by surveying the characteristics of freeports around the world, produced a list of the advantages that freeports need to succeed, and I will mention a few of them now.

At the macro level, freeports must be able to offer lower levels of taxation and less burdensome regulations than exist outside. Those conditions are crucial for attracting new business, creating jobs, and encouraging start-ups. Freeports also need to be able to curb bureaucratic administration by having both automatic concessions and collective processing. Automatic concessions would mean that freeport users do not have to undertake the costly and lengthy process of applying for individual concessions, such as for inward processing relief. Collective processing would also reduce paperwork, as the freeport operators would deal directly with customs documentation on behalf of all, or a number of, their tenants.

Successful freeports must also offer their users security. The heightened security around freeports is often perceived as a necessary burden, required to prevent smuggling. However, the existence of a highly secure customs perimeter affords freeport users huge cost savings in the form of lower insurance premiums. High-value stock is also more secure, and the insurance need cover only the duty-free, rather than duty-paid, value of the stock.

The final advantage that all freeports must be able to offer businesses is improved cash flow. To an extent, it will arise naturally because of the ability to defer duty payments until the goods actually leave the freeport, but additional measures can be taken. Ideally, VAT should be scrapped on transactions within the freeport so that businesses are not required to wait for needless VAT refunds.

In summary, we should not aim to establish the type of insipid freeport that one finds across the European continent. Instead, we should aspire to construct supercharged freeports like those found in China, the US and the middle east.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a powerful and compelling case. He mentioned that freeports come in all shapes and sizes. Does he agree that the UK's regional airports present an opportunity to expand freeports or free zones? It is good to see the Minister in his place; does my hon. Friend, like me, look forward to a positive answer from him to the call for freeports, not only in the north-east but in our regional airports?

**Mr Clarke:** I agree completely that the opportunities are not restricted to Teesport or even to seaports. Airports could be a logical centre for such innovation; I know of freeport zones in Tennessee that are centred around local airports and that keep spreading prosperity to areas that are not naturally at the centre of current economic success. That is the point: freeports can really diversify the benefits of a liberalised economy into areas that have struggled to attract the levels of inward investment that other cities or areas have enjoyed. Regional airports should absolutely be part of the strategy. I think the Government would broadly agree that if the idea is taken forward, it will not be in any way restricted to seaports.

Why are freeports back on the agenda now after a three-decade hibernation? The answer, of course, is Brexit. Leaving the European Union is the perfect opportunity to establish supercharged freeports, for three reasons. First, we will be free from EU regulatory restraint and will therefore have the freedom to create something meaningful, rather than just glorified bonded warehouses. Secondly, as we pivot from Europe to the rest of the world, we will need to be even more competitive to attract new business. I cannot emphasise enough that if we accept a looser economic relationship with Europe, we will have to establish better ways of enhancing our trade relationships with the rest of the world or the exercise will lose all economic meaning. Thirdly, in the event that we end up with no preferential trading relationship with the EU, freeports will help us to maintain frictionless trade, especially for just-in-time supply chains.

That brings me to my final point, which is about our future relationship with the EU. The type of freeport that we can introduce post Brexit is inextricably linked to the type of relationship that we forge with our

European partners. At the heart of the question lies state aid, on which the EU has much more stringent rules than the World Trade Organisation. The most fundamental difference is that under WTO rules, only “financial contributions” count as subsidies, whereas the European Commission defines state aid as “an advantage in any form whatsoever”.

Although setting up a freeport is possible within the EU, the state aid restrictions make it impossible to set up the type of successful freeports that we want and need, with power to attract meaningful levels of foreign investment and incentivise the onshoring of jobs. Crucially, members of the European economic area are automatically bound by all EU state aid rules, while Canada, in its new comprehensive trade agreement with the EU, applies none of them. If we are serious about establishing freeports in the UK, our future relationship with the EU will therefore need to look a lot more like Canada plus than like EEA minus.

From the proposals in the Chequers White Paper, it looks as if the freeport opportunity will die without a shot fired. The White Paper pledges that

“the UK would make an upfront commitment to maintain a common rulebook with the EU on state aid”.

That makes really depressing reading. By committing to apply the entire EU state aid rulebook, we are tying our hands and sapping our ability to attract foreign investment, boost international trade and ultimately create thousands of jobs in the UK, mostly in manufacturing.

To avoid any misunderstanding by the Government, I want it to be crystal clear that, for me, that is not good enough. The whole Chequers approach is characterised by the desire to split the difference between being a member of the EU and being an independent country, but it ends up delivering the benefits of neither. Along with the wider democratic deficit involved in our voting to leave the EU, but then accepting being a rule taker, that is why I must end my speech by emphasising that I am deadly serious that I cannot and will not support the Chequers proposals if they form the basis of an agreement with the EU in a few weeks’ time.

Freeports are one demonstration of why we would fare far better in a looser trading relationship with the EU based on a super-Canada deal. The remaining negotiating time should be spent in practical engagement on the Irish border, to which very clear solutions have been suggested and which I believe is much more about a political than a practical obstacle. It is very simple: time—both for freeports and for a proper Brexit—is running out.

1.45 pm

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): As always, Mr Hanson, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and my near neighbour the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) on securing the debate. It is great to come together across the party divide to champion our area, because the hon. Gentleman and I both recognise how freeport status for Teesport could help and support our constituents.

My constituency lies at the mouth of the River Tees, where the North sea brings its cargo from around the world and ships queue to bring their goods to the third-largest port in the UK. It is from that port that

steel from Redcar’s blast furnaces once sailed forth to build the world. Today, sadly, the site is desolate; the steelworks is now closed, and the 3,000 jobs it sustained are gone. But the land sits waiting, ready to drive a new industrial renaissance for Teesside. A freeport could be the key to unlocking the site’s huge value and delivering thousands more jobs. It could create employment and economic activity in an area where the need is high.

The same is true across the UK, as the hon. Gentleman said. Of the country’s 30 largest ports, 17, including my own, are in the bottom quartile of local authorities in the index of multiple deprivation. They are crying out for the inward investment that a freeport could draw in, so we must take a radical look at proposals to support their economies.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I make no apology for lobbying for freeport status on behalf of the port in my constituency. Teesport has strong structural advantages that should make it favoured for freeport status, including a deep-water facility that provides lock-free access to the sea and strong road and rail services. The facility already handles 5,000 vessels and 40 million tonnes of cargo a year. The port is integral to the Teesside manufacturing complex, incorporating chemicals, engineering, renewable energy and agritech.

The South Tees development corporation is overseeing the former SSI site, the biggest industrial opportunity that the UK has seen since the second world war. The development corporation—the only one of its kind outside London—has set out its ambition to create 20,000 additional jobs in high-value manufacturing over 25 years, with £1 billion in gross value added for the local economy. That programme would be substantially enhanced by the creation of a freeport. Incorporating the development corporation area into a freeport area, together with the Teesport facility, and in conjunction with adjacent industrial sites such as Wilton and North Shore, could help the region to build on its strengths in chemicals, steel, energy and logistics and realise our vision to become the most attractive place in the country for high-value manufacturing.

With the North East of England Process Industry Cluster leading the way, Teesside is the location for the largest integrated chemical complex in the UK—the second largest in western Europe in manufacturing capacity. The sector has inputs to a range of other key industries such as aerospace, automotive and life sciences. It is highly productive and competitive but faces a number of challenges, such as increasing global competition, high operating costs and skills shortages. A freeport could be part of a range of policy solutions to maintain and enhance the attractiveness of investment in the chemical sector in the UK and on Teesside. Freeport status for Teesside could make the area the gateway of the north, rebalancing the economy and making the region’s manufacturing base more competitive and attractive.

As the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland noted, a study commissioned this year by the global construction company Mace Group shows that a freeport in Tees Valley could create more than 17,500 jobs and contribute more than £1 billion to the local economy—more than enough to offset any loss to the Treasury in import tax revenue. That should be considered when we weigh up the economic advantages. For an area in which unemployment is above the national average and many in work have to travel further afield or take insecure jobs, the proposal could be transformative.

[Anna Turley]

As I mentioned, there are many areas similar to mine that have suffered deprivation and industrial decline, and that could see an economic boost delivered by a freeport. A freeport could also future-proof many of our other industries, which are battling to stay increasingly competitive in turbulent world markets. We only have to look around the world to see how our competitors are taking full advantage of freeports. Approximately 3,500 freeport zones exist, employing 66 million people across 135 countries. We are clearly lagging behind the rest of the world in this area.

Freeport zones are recognised around the world as playing a major role in retaining, reshoring and growing domestic manufacturing activity and boosting trade. There are 250 free trade zones in the US, and freeport zones also play a major role in the economies of Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates. However, I would urge caution when we are developing the model, to ensure that there is no erosion of employment rights, environmental rights or health and safety rights. It is really important that we look at the models that are being used around the world if we come to develop our own.

My view diverges slightly from that of the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, who said the advantages of freeports are dependent on being outside the EU. We could be taking advantage of them right now—indeed, he mentioned the legislation that we had in the past for models in the UK. Other member states already have freeports, including the ports of Bremerhaven in Germany, Le Verdon in France, and Shannon in the Republic of Ireland. In fact, there are currently over 85 freeport zones in the European Union. There are no barriers, but there is a lack of political will.

While this is the first debate that we have dedicated to the benefits of freeports, it is not the first time we have made this case in the House. Many Members, including myself and my neighbour, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, have championed freeports for our own areas; indeed, I tabled amendments to the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill that would have established the legislative basis for free zones to return to the UK. Until 2012, we had the legislation in place for five freeports, but unfortunately the statutory instruments creating them expired, and freeports were never fully explored. Moreover, the Secretary of State is already empowered to designate any freeport by statutory instrument under section 100A of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, which was referred to earlier and which is still in force.

I say to the Minister that the Government have an opportunity here to deliver transformative change to deprived areas across the UK, including my own. There could be no better expression of the northern powerhouse than delivering a freeport boost to northern ports and ports across the country, stimulating manufacturing, rebalancing the economy and creating jobs. I beg the Government to give serious consideration to this issue without delay.

1.52 pm

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for

Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) on securing this important debate at a particularly opportune time. The UK is an island nation and has always been very dependent on our ports; indeed, 90% of all our trade by volume, and 75% of our trade by value, passes through UK ports. Post Brexit, we have an opportunity to capitalise on this and to open up the country to world markets at a level never previously seen as possible.

I take note of the slight differences between the two previous speakers' views on whether membership of the EU restricts us in doing that; my understanding is that it certainly does, and it is worth noting that the Mace report referred to previously says that leaving the EU and the customs union can be seized on as an opportunity to enhance the UK's ability to achieve these things. Let us ignore whether they are, strictly speaking, allowable at the moment; the fact is that Brexit is going to happen, and it provides the window of opportunity that we need.

Taking certain areas around a port or an airport and putting them outside the domestic customs area, as my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland said, is good for business. It is also worth noting that the designated freeport need not be entirely adjacent to the port estate. In my constituency, there is an industrial estate called Europarc, which straddles the Grimsby and Cleethorpes constituencies. In discussions I have had with operators there, they can see great value in designating that as a part of the freeport zone.

As has been outlined, freeports allow us to import goods from abroad, and goods leaving the area can be sent abroad, without the usual duties—it incentivises domestic manufacturing. Around the world, there are something like 3,500 freeports, but sadly there is none here in the UK. That puts us at a considerable disadvantage and poses a serious risk of us slipping behind some of our trading partners and competitors.

The Chief Secretary recently visited my constituency. On that occasion, I hosted a discussion on freeports, which included Associated British Ports—the port operators of Grimsby and Immingham—Humberside Airport, Young's Seafood, the Humber local enterprise partnership and the Hull and Humber chamber of commerce. It was highly encouraging to hear the strong levels of support from those organisations, which encompass both the public and private sectors. On the day, the Chief Secretary tweeted that freeports for the north could give the UK a £9 million boost. I say to the Minister that an even more senior Minister than his good self has already committed to the fact that freeports will give us a £9 million boost. Since the Treasury says so, we know it must be true.

ABP, which owns and controls much of the port infrastructure in my constituency and the surrounding area, is incredibly positive about the prospect of freeports being rolled out across the country. If done properly, there is absolutely no doubt that there could be numerous benefits for this major port operator and, more importantly, for local businesses that feed into the area around our major ports. When I took Simon Bird, the port director for the Humber ports, to see Brexit Ministers some months ago, he outlined the concept of a freeport corridor between the various ports, perhaps on the east

and west coasts. I know Ministers were enthusiastic about it at that stage, and it is something that could be looked at in the future.

By exempting products from import tariffs, businesses can process and manufacture goods to be exported to a third country. That reduces costs, increases profitability and leads to greater local investment. By allowing products to enter the zone and have duty paid when they leave it later, businesses can warehouse and process goods and improve cash-flow cycles and efficiency. That is especially beneficial for sectors that depend on just-in-time management, such as the fishing and fresh food sectors—that is of particular importance to my constituency, where 5,000 people are employed in fish processing.

Another reason to support freeports is tariff inversion. Finished products generally face lower tariffs than the parts that make them. If the Humber were to be made a freeport, cars could be brought into Immingham and Grimsby, as they are today, along with additional upgrade components. There are also tax incentives: we can incentivise companies to generate new economic activity within freeport zones, and this can be done by a range of methods, such as offering reduced rates of corporation tax, rewarding job creation with lower levels of employment rates, or by setting a lower rate of VAT on goods brought in through the zone. I fully agree with the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) that it is absolutely vital that we do not use the freeport concept to reduce employee standards in the workplace.

Many tangible benefits would be felt quickly by local businesses and communities where freeports are implemented. Some of our best ports are in the northern coastal communities that have been run down over the years, as referred to previously. Freeports would enable regeneration in these communities through private enterprise rather than at the expense of the taxpayer. Freeports are an opportunity that can be seized on to ensure that businesses are attracted to those northern communities that have been left behind, and to make the most of competitive global trading markets.

It is for that reason that I launched the all-party parliamentary group on freeports a few months ago, and I thank my colleagues for electing me as the group's chairman. I hope the APPG can keep this issue on the political agenda—I appreciate Ministers are rather bogged down at the moment with the details of Brexit. Perhaps we need to concentrate more on the opportunities of Brexit.

The areas around the ports, including my own—the Grimsby-Cleethorpes-Immingham area—have been ranked in the bottom quartile for deprived areas. A policy that leads to a boost in investment has got to be welcomed. Five of the UK's major ports are located in the north. Together, they handle more than 10 million tonnes of goods and contribute £5 billion of economic value each year. By tonnage, the Grimsby and Immingham docks complex is the largest in the country. It ranks first in the UK for trade in coal, second for metal ores and third for oil products. The port of Immingham alone is responsible for providing fuel for 10% of the UK's energy production. Clearly, it is vital for the UK's energy strategy that freeport status further unlocks that potential.

In the Humber, there is a strategic focus on energy—specifically renewables. The continuing investment in the renewable energy sector is another example of the

investment and job opportunities in Immingham and the surrounding area. As coal declines, biomass has grown, and Immingham is crucial for the import of the biomass that is supplied to the Drax power station near Selby.

We talk a great deal about rebalancing the economy and ending the north-south divide. That is a mission of every Government, but we have yet to achieve it in any meaningful way. In 2016, the northern economy created £330 billion of economic output, but had the north and south been balanced, it would have been about £400 billion. That is £70 billion more—equivalent to £15,000 per household in the north of England. If the Government are serious about addressing that imbalance—and I know they are—freeports are a logical means to that end.

Hon. Members have already referred to the report from the consultancy company Mace, which puts forward the idea of freeport status for seven northern ports. It states:

“The successes of the Humber—the ‘Energy Estuary’—demonstrate the sheer scale of sector-specific successes that can be achieved”.

Freeports would be a sensible way to expand that success, for not just the north of England but the whole country.

There is also the possibility of combining freeports with existing enterprise zones to create supercharged freeports, which would be a powerful force for economic growth and job creation. Mace calculated that declaring those seven ports across the north as supercharged would boost trade by £12 billion and create 150,000 jobs in the north. That would be a momentous step for the northern powerhouse and would prove beyond doubt that the idea is more than just a slogan. Projections show that the supercharged freeports could close the north UK productivity gap by 15%, which would be another welcome step in rebalancing the economy.

Freeports are inextricably linked to Brexit. The success of this policy requires the UK to have full control of its trade policy and customs arrangements. Freeports can be properly implemented only in a post-Brexit world. Although technically possible within the EU, red tape and restrictions from Brussels would make them somewhat ineffective and would seriously hinder our ability to become a truly global Britain. The Shannon free trade zone, set up in the Republic of Ireland in 1959, has been decimated by the Republic's membership of the EU. Having discussed the matter with industry experts, I am convinced that the current plans for our relationship with the EU, as outlined in the White Paper, would be insufficient to make a success of freeports. I fully concur with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland about the Chequers deal. We have got to establish full control over our trade and economic policies. That crucial message was delivered during the referendum campaign, and we need to deliver on it properly.

Cleethorpes, Grimsby and Immingham make up the North East Lincolnshire Council area, which voted 70% for Brexit. As one of the MPs for that area, I am determined to press the Government on every possible occasion to ensure that what those people voted for is delivered. A freeports policy would instantly end the criticism that the Brexit decision was about being little England. This is an opportunity to broaden our trading

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capacity and look to the growing economies in India, China, the far east, South America and so on, rather than solely focus on the EU economies, which are static at best.

I urge the Minister to be brave, break out from his brief, go along with the Chief Secretary and give us a real boost. Let us talk about the opportunities of Brexit, rather than the problems of getting there. Over to you, Minister.

2.5 pm

**Julia Lopez** (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I appreciate the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) has injected some much needed energy into post-Brexit planning.

Brexit should be a moment of creative opportunity, when we begin to tailor our nation better to fit our citizens' needs and ambitions. Leaving the EU was never going to be easy—I am not naive—but we in this House have spent two years engaged in a series of infertile, factional war dances, unable to unify around a vision that would allow us to plan properly for the future. Let us have more debates like this in which we set out fresh ideas that can deliver results for the people we represent.

Freeports, as other hon. Members have said, are special trading zones that are considered to be outside a country for customs purposes. Goods can enter and exit a freeport without incurring tariffs and the need for import procedures. That makes way for the import of semi-finished products, such as car parts, from other countries into the UK on special terms. Such parts can be modified or stored, to be re-exported as UK products. By themselves, initiatives such as freeports will not spark a manufacturing renaissance, but when integrated with local enterprise zones, they can help to create the conditions for manufacturing to thrive—particularly in northern towns, which for too long have lived in the shadow of our industrial heritage. The idea deserves consideration as part of a dynamic new trade strategy.

However, let us be truthful: we cannot have a meaningful, independent trade strategy if we remain in a de facto customs union with the EU. The notion that we can sign trade agreements worth having while contained within an indefinite backstop arrangement is, I fear, misguided. Time and again in the International Trade Committee, of which I am a member, and in meetings, international partners have expressed a genuine eagerness to engage in new trading arrangements and initiatives with the UK. They are excited about the re-entry of a major G7 player as an independent trading nation that can push an agenda on global standards and free trade. However, they advise us that it is impossible to start much of that work without a clear sense of the UK's future trading arrangements with the EU.

Meanwhile, businesses tell us clearly that they simply want clarity, and then they will deal with whatever new arrangements come to pass. The outcome of our withdrawal negotiations must not leave us in a state of perpetual uncertainty. That would be hugely damaging to our nation's economic interests, and I dare not contemplate

how the public would feel if we advised that we had delivered on the referendum result while subcontracting regulatory policy making to our EU competitors. Contempt for the political class would surely deepen, with consequences for our democracy.

The EU has been criticised for vigorously protecting its own interests in this negotiation. Of course, it does not want a more dynamic competitor on its doorstep—I understand that—but we should be equally vigorous in defending our own interests. Freeports, free trade agreements, regulation and trade facilitation measures should all be part of a modern global trade strategy, but infrastructure investment and the manner in which we connect it coherently is also critical.

It may not be fashionable to champion investment in London in a Chamber full of non-London MPs, but the capital should be understood not as one rich haven but as a collection of very different regions, not all of which are thriving and not all of which have seen sustained investment over the years. Before containerisation and offshoring, London's docks and manufacturers provided east Londoners with a range of opportunities for blue-collar work. By the '60s, however, the docks began to close, leaving in their wake high levels of unemployment and the depopulation of docking boroughs. The redevelopment of the Isle of Dogs into London's second financial hub, Canary Wharf, has been a staggering success, but many communities to Canary Wharf's east still see the glittering office blocks as something very distant from their lives.

Today in Barking and Dagenham, one third of people are paid less than the London living wage. Meanwhile, parts of my own borough of Havering have a very low skills base. More than half of the adults in the borough do not have A-level-equivalent qualifications. Ford in Dagenham, which was once London's biggest employer, stopped car production in 2002, and a workforce that was 40,000 at its height has diminished to 1,830.

Exciting things are happening in east London and the Thames Gateway, including the newish London Gateway port, Chinese investment in the Royal Albert dock, planned film studios in Dagenham and the arrival of the Barking continental freight railway. All these developments require a catalyst to bring them together and help the region and its people fulfil their huge potential. Perversely, although it is west London's airport, that catalyst could be Heathrow, which is the UK's biggest port by value, handling over £106 billion-worth of goods each year. Now that its expansion has been given the green light in Parliament, the airport's executives want to build large chunks of the new expanded airport offsite at so-called logistics hubs, and then transport those components of the third runway to the site as and when they are required. With infrastructure projects like HS2 and Sizewell contemplating sharing those hubs, the bid that makes the final cut can expect an influx of cutting-edge engineering, research and manufacturing jobs to the area.

Havering has put together an exciting plan for a logistics hub at an 86-acre brownfield site next to the Ford Dagenham plant, which is a stone's throw from Canary Wharf. As one of the borough's three MPs, I am extremely excited by the opportunity that the plan presents for reigniting manufacturing in the capital. Superbly connected by river, rail, road and air, the site is next to an industrial estate with 70 logistics companies already there. It is near the ports of Tilbury and London



Gateway, as well as the Barking terminus of the intercontinental railway, which, as I have said before, is part of China's belt and road initiative. A housing zone is planned nearby and the adjacent Centre for Engineering and Manufacturing Excellence, as well as Havering College's expanding construction campus, could train up local jobseekers.

The Havering-Heathrow hub could therefore have a profound impact in tackling deprivation, crime and unemployment in an area that has struggled to replace the kinds of blue-collar jobs that were formerly provided by the docks and the motor industry. Once the runway is built, the logistics hub could become a cargo processing centre.

We need to do imaginative things which will rapidly and effectively signal what kind of nation we seek to be as we leave the European Union. For instance, could a Havering hub be turned into an east London check-in point for Heathrow itself, taking thousands of car journeys away from the M25 and removing luggage from tube trains as passengers catch organised shuttles or dedicated rail services to the main terminals? A rail line already connects Ford's Dagenham plant to Stratford, and the Abbey Wood branch of Crossrail could be extended by one stop to provide a direct route to the airport. The Thames could reclaim its glory days of transporting cargo—taking countless lorries off the roads—and acting as a link between air and sea freight terminals. All this would help reduce pressure on the communities around Heathrow airport. We could even explore the creation of a free trade zone from the cargo processing hub at Beam Reach—the logistics hub site—to the ports at Tilbury and Thurrock, which would finally unlock the regeneration aspirations of the Thames Gateway and supercharge the eastern region as a global trading portal that links London and the UK to the rest of the world.

The capital may have been thriving for those working in the service industries, but that has not been the case for many in blue-collar professions. As we leave the European Union, why not use the opportunity of the expansion of our biggest port, Heathrow, to restore east London's illustrious heritage as a cutting-edge manufacturing centre?

No one aspect of our trading policy can be a panacea in diversifying our economy and making it deliver for people who feel left behind. Realigning our country to global ambitions will take time and cannot be done through free trade agreements alone—it is about infrastructure investment, trade facilitation measures, tax policy, regulation, freeports and other ideas coming together in one coherent strategy. But to maximise that strategy, we need control of our own regulatory and customs tax policy. Please, let us not pretend otherwise.

2.13 pm

**Lee Rowley** (North East Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson, and thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke), and other hon. Members present, on being the driving force behind this debate, to which it is a pleasure to contribute. In the year and a half that my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland

and I have been in Parliament, he has been a doughty campaigner on this issue, and has sent me and other new MPs many letters, pieces of information and general perorations telling us about the wonderful opportunity of freeports. I am grateful to have the opportunity to agree with him officially and on the record.

I came here to listen as much as to speak, because this is an area of interest to me but not one that I know a huge amount about. Some of the speeches have been incredibly useful in helping somebody who is new to the subject understand it. People may ask why a Member of Parliament for one of the most landlocked constituencies in the country—roughly 70 miles away from either coast—is talking about freeports, and while other Members have been speaking, I have been trying to work out a way in which I could make a connection. I attended Transport questions earlier, and we received the extremely good news that the go-ahead has been given for the regeneration and connection of the final stretch of the 250-year-old Chesterfield canal, which links to the River Trent at Stockwith, near the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), before reaching the North sea at Hull. The canal was threatened for years and years because of the potential for High Speed 2 to rip it up. Hopefully, we can push for a freeport at the end of the Chesterfield canal at some point in the next couple of decades, when that regeneration occurs.

The real reason I am here is that it is so pleasing to see a debate in this place about the power and the opportunity that economic capitalism and liberalism could unleash on populations such as those in the constituencies of the hon. Members who have spoken, before spreading to other constituencies like my own. In the year and a half that I have been here, I have looked over the Order Paper every single day. Often, it seems to be a never ending set of requests for more activity and more intervention, and for more to be done by the state. Sometimes, it is incumbent upon Members to stand back and realise that some of the wider powers and bigger forces that actually improve lives in this country can only act when we let government get out of the way and let people and commerce thrive in the way that freeports would allow if instituted properly, as my hon. Friends have outlined. I am extremely pleased that we are all agreeing that the forces of liberalism and capitalism—much-maligned in recent years—have the power to do good, make our areas richer, put money in people's pockets and drive our country forward.

Secondly, I want to speak about the opportunities arising from Brexit, which have already been touched on. It is so refreshing to be in a debate in which we do not necessarily talk much about Brexit—although I am going to touch on it in a moment—but about the opportunities that it can bring. This being one of the first debates in the new term, I hope that it is a turning point, and that we can now look beyond Brexit rather than being completely consumed by the seemingly interminable process of it, which I fear will require us to go through significant time, energy and tears yet.

I concur with my hon. Friends the Members for Cleethorpes, for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, and for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez), that if we are to leave the EU—we are leaving; my constituents voted 63% to leave—we need to leave in a way that gives us the most flexibility, the most opportunity and the

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most ability to innovate in the coming months, years and decades. That is the prize and the opportunity that our country needs to grasp. If we do not do that—if we fall between two stools and fail to recognise that we have the power to stand on our own two feet independently, while remaining hugely friendly with our European friends and allies—we will not be delivering the Brexit that people voted for in 2016 and, more importantly, we will not be obtaining the opportunities or the value that could come from Brexit. I wholeheartedly endorse the comments made by my hon. Friends: Chequers in its current form does not work and it does not give us the opportunities we have been talking about today, and I will not support it if it is put to a vote in the House.

The third reason for my speech is that this is an opportunity for us to innovate, to change, to look at how our regulations do or not work, and to boost our commerce. The most nimble and most independent countries will thrive in the next few decades, and innovations such as freeports offer us the opportunity to do so. As my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland outlined, examples such as Jebel Ali in the United Arab Emirates, which has 140,000 people working there and receives nearly a fifth of all direct investment in the UAE, demonstrates the kind of opportunities that we may be able to grasp if we take them.

There are also manufacturing opportunities. My constituency is an old manufacturing area, as well as an old mining area, and it still has a significant amount of manufacturing. If freeports can contribute in any way to bringing back some manufacturing, with a focus on high-skill manufacturing, building on what we have, we should all welcome that.

In summary, I am still trying to work out how to get a freeport 70 miles away from a coast. I will continue to think that through at my leisure. Divergence is sometimes an opportunity, as this is. I hope that we, as a Government and a country, will take up such opportunities, because if we do we can be extremely successful in the years to come.

**David Hanson (in the Chair):** We have an abundance of time for the Front-Bench speakers, so there is no need for them to restrict themselves to the normal 10 minutes each.

2.20 pm

**Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP):** Thank you, Mr Hanson, and it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I warmly thank the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) for bringing the debate to the Chamber.

The hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) said early on that he was present to listen rather than to speak. Given some of the comments we have heard and will continue to hear about Brexit, clearly we need to start listening a lot more, because we need to learn new tricks if we want our economy to survive and to be a real success.

I do not want to detract from the cross-party consensus, but Brexit takes away the European Union customs union—or is likely to—which in effect is a huge economic free trade zone, with no costs from borders or additional

taxation in each individual member state of the EU. In the absence of the customs union, therefore, we will have to invent or reinvent a freeport or free zone area in our own country to compensate.

Even so, many EU countries have freeport or free zone areas—22 countries have such arrangements, I think. In Spain, for example, elements of free trade zones are found on the Mediterranean coast in the ports of Barcelona and Cadiz; in the north, on the Atlantic coast, in Vigo; and in the airport area in Madrid, which was fairly landlocked last time I looked—though perhaps not as much as eastern Derbyshire. Closer to home, the Isle of Man has a free zone, as do other countries in the EU. From my perspective, the great bonus of freeports is the boost to economic activity in areas where trading conditions need a shot in the arm to increase jobs, economic vibrancy, trade and exports.

According to many reports, Brexit will have a more detrimental effect in Northern Ireland, north-east England, Wales and Scotland than elsewhere. In Scotland, according to a fairly recent report, we are looking at a 9% reduction in gross domestic product if we go into Brexit under World Trade Organisation rules. If there is a no-deal Brexit, the GDP of north-east England is expected to drop by some 16%, and 80,000 jobs in my country will be at risk. I hope that we do not get to that stage, but the warning signals are clearly there.

To have the most impact, free trade or freeport zones are best placed outside London and the south-east. If someone is determined—as I am sure the Minister is—to address economic inequality throughout the UK, we need to consider how to boost the economy in other parts of the UK—the parts that will be worst affected by Brexit. The British Ports Association has said that freeports would be most beneficial where a port has plenty of land so that value-adding economic activity can also take place.

All Members who have spoken in the debate have made a case for their own neck of the woods, and I am delighted to let everyone know a little about my constituency. Our local port, Rosyth, has all the ingredients necessary for the successful operation of a freeport: a lot of available land, much of it on brownfield sites; a rail link that is greatly underutilised but nevertheless only a mile from the main east coast line; and a motorway system that includes the new, iconic Queensferry crossing, providing a 15-minute corridor between the port of Rosyth and Edinburgh airport. We also have a talented workforce—the usual situation in Scotland, as I think every Member would accept—and the desire to become the beating heart of the Scottish economy, ready to take on opportunities wherever they may appear.

An opportunity that no one has yet mentioned is an unwanted feature of climate change: more and more sea routes are being created to the north and through the Arctic. Ships can now move along the northern coast of Norway, past Russia and to China, with a number of months in the year seeing more seaborne activity. In a northern port such as Rosyth, with easy access to those waters, we see that as a bonus.

We also have to take care. As the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) pointed out, freeports cannot be introduced to push along a low-wage economy or to act as a centre for illegal trade just because some of the rules have been softened or relaxed. They might also be disrespectful of the environment—even in a freeport, the “polluter pays” principle must still apply.

The British Ports Association briefing, which I think we all received, made for some encouraging reading: 95% of trade is carried by sea, whether imports or exports, container traffic or bulk goods; 60 million passenger journeys are made between the UK and the rest of Europe every year; and 500 million tonnes of freight pass through all ports in the UK, which employ almost 100,000 people. We have a really good ports sector on which to build, and that is a real feather in our cap, a real hand-up and a great start in developing our port facilities.

I am a member of the all-party group on freeports, under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), and I believe that we will be able to highlight some of the pros and cons of freeports. We are all determined to grow our economy, to create jobs and to deal with some of the vagaries of Brexit in the parts of the country that will be hardest hit. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the possibility of creating a super-freeport zone. If that included a specific focus on inward investment and a wider economic corridor, we could gain different benefits from a wide range of enterprises, and perhaps bring in an innovation hub linking universities and colleges in whichever area the freeport might sit.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's views. An early announcement on freeports and how they will be financed will be very welcome.

2.28 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) on securing this important and timely debate.

We have heard how our ports play a vital role in facilitating our global trade, and about their importance to coastal communities and regional economies. However, 95% of our goods trade passes through our ports, which is significantly higher than the EU and international averages. Our businesses depend on our ports to get their goods to overseas markets. Our ports handle an estimated 500 million tonnes of freight each year, making our port industry the second largest in the EU, with more than 100,000 people in towns and cities around our coast employed directly, and many thousands more in supporting and related businesses. In 2015, the maritime sector accounted for approximately £4.7 billion in tax revenues—some 0.7% of the total tax take that year, with the port and shipping industries being the largest contributors.

I welcome the renewed focus on the maritime sector in the wake of Brexit. Although it is right that we consider the role that ports play, we must also consider that role in the context of Brexit. The Department for Transport estimates that in 2017, 55% of international tonnage passing through UK major ports was to or from the EU. It is still our largest trading partner, accounting for 44% of our exports and 53% of our imports.

The Government's chaotic handling of Brexit could cause tariffs to be imposed on exported goods, along with increased paperwork, inspections, audits and so forth. It could cause bottlenecks at ports here and on

the continent. Security or customs delays could cause substantial tailbacks leading up to our ports as freight lorries are forced to pool while waiting for ports in France or the Netherlands to clear any backlogs that build up there.

The impact on ports such as Dover, where 99% of through trade is to or from the EU, will be substantial. Other ports, such as those that are members of the UK Major Ports Group, have suggested that they are investing substantially in infrastructure and capacity expansion, to be prepared for any eventuality. Sadly, it seems that the Government have yet to adequately prepare for the same. Towards the end of last year, at a hearing of the Public Accounts Committee, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs told Members of Parliament that the new customs declaration system would not be fully up and running in time for Brexit and that the system had not been designed with any increased customs processing in mind.

That is precisely why Labour has repeatedly called for a new customs agreement with the EU, to ensure that our businesses can continue to export tariff-free and without friction at the border. Today's debate should perhaps have focused on that and the Government's complete failure to ensure that our ports are supported in the event of any change to our current trade relationship with the EU. Nevertheless, we are here to debate the reintroduction of freeports. I say reintroduction because, as many Members have alluded to and will remember, the UK has already experimented with freeports at the ports of Liverpool, Southampton, Tilbury, Sheerness and Prestwick airport. Those freeports, established while we were a member of the European Union, were freeports in the true sense of the term: a defined area outside our customs territory, where goods could enter without attracting taxes or tariffs.

If the Government are considering whether to re-establish such a model, will the Minister tell us why, under the coalition Government, it was decided in 2012 that the freeports would not continue? Are we really talking about not a freeport per se, but a free trade or free enterprise zone, where goods can be manufactured and services rendered without being subject to the ordinary tax and/or legal regimes of this country?

Ministers, including the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), have suggested that the Government should consider adopting the American model of free trade zones, in which businesses would be given tax incentives to relocate. Although there may be evidence to demonstrate that such a model creates employment and attracts investment, very rarely is any assessment made of the extent to which those jobs and that investment are displaced, resulting in job losses and business closures elsewhere.

There is evidence around the world to suggest that such free trade zones are exploited by investors and businesses that seek to take advantage of general tax holidays and lax employment laws, while failing to produce the economic benefits promised.

**Mr Simon Clarke:** I thank the hon. Lady for highlighting the importance of EU trade, with which I completely agree. On displacing business from elsewhere, which is really important, I know from conversations with Ministers that that is at the heart of the Treasury's concern to

[Mr Simon Clarke]

ensure that we do not just end up shifting jobs from one part of our country to another. This is about winning business from outside the UK for the UK that otherwise would not be here. I do not believe, for example, that if we had a string of freeports around our country they would take jobs away from other port areas in the UK. It would be about winning new businesses and jobs.

**Judith Cummins:** I will come on to the importance of defining what is a freeport. A 2011 review of special economic zones by the World Bank suggested that many such models had become white elephants, with the cost of revenue lost to the Exchequer outweighing the benefits. At the same time, *The Economist* reported that they create distortions in economies and that many fail, leaving a long trail of failed zones that either never got going, were poorly run or in which investors gladly took tax breaks without producing substantial employment or export earnings.

Reports have repeatedly surfaced from free enterprise or free trade zones around the world that demonstrate lax enforcement of labour laws. Polish workers have been sacked for an illegal strike against poor working conditions at a business located in a special economic zone. There are similar examples in China, Cambodia and elsewhere. The European Parliament's director general for external policies found that often in such zones

"the governance of labour rights may differ from the rest of the country and fall below international legal standards".

If the Government are considering such a model, will they tell us how they intend to ensure that workers' rights are protected and enforced? Will the Minister tell us what discussions he has had with trade unions?

Serious concerns have been raised about how a combination of tax incentives and relaxed monitoring and supervision, even by competent regulators, has resulted in a reduction in finance and trade controls and enforcement, creating opportunities for money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force raised precisely those concerns in the inaugural review of free trade zones in 2015. It noted that

"the same characteristics that make FTZs attractive to legitimate business also attract abuse by illicit actors".

The Financial Action Task Force also noted that FTZs have been used in the transport and production of weapons of mass destruction.

**Lee Rowley:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for outlining all the potential issues, but does that mean we should not have freeports because those things may happen?

**Judith Cummins:** I said at the beginning of my speech that this is a timely debate, because these things need to be said. However, until we get the deal we cannot rule anything in or out, because the devil is always in the detail.

The United Kingdom must not be allowed to become a bargain basement tax haven off the coast of Europe. That includes not allowing any schemes that would allow the abuse of workers' rights, financial checks, export licencing regimes or money laundering checks. Although we recognise the various calls for a freeport review from industry groups, from the Key Cities group

to the British Ports Association and the British Hospitality Association, we must note that it is only one aspect of their much larger call for coastal communities to have a strategy to ensure that investment and growth are facilitated across the UK. That includes investing in transport and infrastructure and improving port connectivity.

Today's debate must not be used to mask failures by this Government: a failure to bring forward any coherent proposal for our future trading relationship with the EU; a failure to give our exporters any clarity about what their future trade environment looks like; a failure to adequately prepare for Brexit at our ports; a failure to properly invest in transport infrastructure; and a failure to develop any coherent plan to support economic growth and investment in our coastal communities.

I look forward to the Minister's response to the points that other hon. Members and I have raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) spoke eloquently of her local community; she shared her ambition for a freeport to unleash the economic potential in her area. All Members spoke about the importance of defining what we mean when we speak about freeports and the importance of rebalancing our economy. Crucially, I urge the Minister to commit today to consult properly with all Members of Parliament who represent potentially affected areas, because they deserve to be heard.

2.39 pm

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick):**

It is a pleasure to respond to the debate. Like my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley), I represent one of the most landlocked constituencies in the country, although the River Trent is still tidal when it reaches Newark, so perhaps there is potential for a freeport in Newark one day.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), who sadly could not be with us, for raising an important issue. This issue interests me a great deal. I engaged with it before I became a Minister, when I was involved in a proposal for a freeport around East Midlands airport, and in my business career before being elected to Parliament, when I visited and engaged with freeports in Geneva and Shanghai. I have seen both the advantages and the disadvantages of some of the freeports around the world.

I support the goals that underpin many of the arguments we have heard: increasing global trade at a pivotal moment for our country's future; increasing economic development in all parts of the United Kingdom and inward investment in those parts that have seen less of it in recent years; supporting manufacturing and particularly advanced manufacturing that takes advantage of the new technologies that are transforming the way we produce products—we want to ensure the UK is at the heart of those new processes; and seeking new free market approaches to growing our economy. Those are a good thing in themselves and send positive signals about our country, our openness and our willingness to create a business-friendly environment for investment. We have had a positive debate along all those lines.

I reassure Members that the Treasury has engaged actively with stakeholders on this topic. We have already heard that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to

the Treasury visited my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) in Immingham. She and I also visited the Tees Valley Mayor in the constituency of the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) to hear the proposals there, and we later met my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland.

I held a roundtable at the Treasury earlier this year with the ports sector and the Minister with responsibility for ports. I listened to people's ideas and enthusiasm about freeports and invited them to gather their thoughts and come back to us with substantive proposals, and I committed to giving those proposals the consideration they deserve. I remain keen to receive such proposals and to see what we might be able to achieve together.

Let me begin along the same lines as my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland. There seem to be two principal advantages to a freeport—the first on the customs side, and the second around the regulatory changes and supply-side reforms that could flow alongside that. Let me dwell for a moment on the customs aspect, which is perhaps the most important from the Treasury's perspective and in the current debates about Brexit.

As we heard, it is already possible for a private operator to apply to become a free zone. We have ensured that that will still be possible after we leave the European Union, under any scenario. The hon. Member for Redcar asked whether, under the current legislation, she would be able to apply for one with respect to Teesside and the South Tees Development Corporation. Yes, that is possible under the law as it is today, and as it will be in any scenario after we leave the European Union, but she or other stakeholders would need to come to us with substantive proposals. That is how people would expect the Treasury to behave when making important long-term decisions about the tax system—they would not expect us simply to act on a whim.

The Treasury will continue to have the power to designate free zones under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Act 2018, which I appreciate everyone is familiar with and which will enable HMRC to set requirements for goods within free zones. Whether to apply for designation as a free zone will continue to be a commercial decision for the private operators of a port—in discussion with HMRC and the Treasury, clearly—and we are open to applications.

I want to be very clear as we discuss the customs benefits that most, if not all, of the customs benefits of a free zone are available today. We heard about the two most significant facilitations that we as a country provide for business in this respect—customs warehousing and inward processing relief. Those allow imported goods to be stored and to undergo value-adding processes, with duty being paid only when the goods are released into free circulation, or never if they are re-exported elsewhere in the world. I will explain that in more detail in a moment.

Those benefits are not limited to particular locations, so they do not provide the region-specific targeted boost that certain hon. Members present would like. However, they are available to any business anywhere in the country, which is an important freedom in itself. More than 8,500 companies across the United Kingdom benefit from customs facilitations every year and are able to pass those benefits down through their supply

chain, potentially to smaller businesses. Those benefits will continue regardless of the outcome of our negotiations with the EU and our exit from the EU next year.

Let me use Liverpool as an example—I hope the right hon. Member for Birkenhead reads the report of the debate when he emerges in the coming days. Liverpool was one of the five areas of the UK with a free zone under the EU scheme, which we heard about from my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland. As we heard, those zones were not redesignated in 2012, partly due to concerns about customs assurance around the type of free zone. Much though many of us would like to support free zones, it must be said that there was very little negative reaction to that. We understand that many of the companies that operated in those free zones now benefit in almost exactly the same way as they did before from customs facilitations the UK already offers. We have not received substantive proposals to revisit that.

Let me return to the example of Liverpool. Today, a manufacturer in Liverpool is able to gain all the benefits of a free zone without being constrained to locating within the free zone site. Setting aside large sites such as the south Tees site, some sites, including the one in Liverpool, are quite constrained and do not have the ability to become vast sites such as the one in Dubai we heard about.

If there was a ship manufacturer, for instance, in Liverpool or Birkenhead, materials for its vessels could be imported and stored in a customs warehouse somewhere in the Liverpool area, or anywhere else in the country, without duties being paid on them. The manufacturer or its supply chain could then use those materials in the manufacturing process under inward processing relief, and the finished ships could be exported without any UK customs duty ever having to be paid. That avoids the distortions and perverse geographical outcomes that would undoubtedly arise with free zones, where a manufacturer or its supply chain would feel the need to locate on the same site, although I appreciate that would be beneficial to those locations, some of which require urgent inward investment.

The UK's current customs facilitations offer broadly the same benefits that attract businesses to free zones in other developed countries, such as the United States. For example, two thirds of goods imported to US foreign trade zones are brought in to enjoy the same tariff-free manufacturing benefits offered by inward processing relief. The other third are stored in those zones, gaining the same cash-flow benefits offered by customs warehousing. From a customs perspective, the UK model compares favourably with the model in the United States—arguably more so because it does not force or encourage a company to locate in a particular place, but gives it the freedom to operate and trade wherever it wishes throughout the United Kingdom.

However, as Members would expect, we want to ensure we have an even more business-friendly environment, particularly as we leave the European Union. I am sure there are ways we can improve those customs arrangements, and we are actively engaged in identifying how we might do that now or post Brexit. We are open to suggestions from hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, who is very engaged with this issue. We are also actively engaged with people in some communities, including

[Robert Jenrick]

the Tees Valley Mayor and the hon. Member for Redcar, about how we might make those arrangements place-specific. That certainly could be taken forward.

As my hon. Friend said, if one agrees that the customs benefits are more limited because we have a fairly favourable customs arrangement—I have already described that—the wider question is how we can improve supply-side reforms and the business-friendly environment in the whole country or in particular places. In that regard, I draw Members' attention to a couple of things on which we are focusing heavily.

Like many of those who have contributed to the debate, I want to see supply-side reforms to boost growth and support business. With the Chancellor and Chief Secretary, I have been highly engaged in efforts to increase productivity and regional growth in that way.

As the hon. Member for Redcar said, we should exercise caution because we do not want to propose ideas, whether in a freeport or another setting, that would lower environmental standards or indeed workers' rights. We have been clear that we see leaving the European Union as an opportunity to not only protect those rights but enhance them. No proposals should be at the expense of the environment, workers' rights or other things in our regulatory framework that we are proud of as a country and want to see continued or enhanced.

We are, however, highly engaged in how we can increase economic growth in particular places, either because they require it more than others, having received less investment in recent years, or because there is a significant national economic opportunity for growth that requires Government support. In that regard, we have made a number of interventions that build on a long history, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland referred, going back to the 1980s and the Thatcher revolution. They include locally led or mayoral development corporations—that power is available to the Mayor of Tees Valley. They also include enterprise zones, which the Government have expanded since 2010, creating many more in different combinations, including those linked to universities, which provide particular opportunities to help universities orientate themselves towards the local and regional economy, commercialise research and development, and help start-ups to scale up and achieve their potential. In some cases, those approaches have had the benefits that my hon. Friend described. Again, we are open to further conversations on how we might deliver them.

Development corporations empower places to overcome local barriers to growth and have provided a sharper commercial focus to large-scale Government investments to help develop local areas. In the Tees Valley, the first mayoral development corporation outside of London has been set up by the excellent local Mayor, Ben Houchen, whom I met only yesterday to discuss his future proposals.

At the Conservative party conference, we announced funding to boost growth and development in the east midlands between Nottingham and Leicester, creating a new locally led delivery model—potentially a development corporation—around Toton. Again, that is an area of significant economic potential, and we want to use the levers available to us in central Government, working

closely with local leadership and the business community, to take that forward at pace. The funding will support the area to move on with those announced proposals.

We are supporting local businesses particularly through enterprise zones—since 2012, we have established a further 48 of them—in all regions of the United Kingdom, including most of those represented here today, and certainly in the Tees Valley. In those zones, businesses benefit from tax and regulatory incentives. We have piloted other models, including, at the Budget last year, an east midlands-focused manufacturing zone to provide a more business-friendly environment for manufacturing businesses.

We are open to further conversations in that regard. We want to see more locally led models and development corporations and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) said, more Canary Wharf-style opportunities to transform local areas and drive the economy forward at pace, with a particular focus on planning, where there is growing consensus for further liberalisation. There may be great opportunities to do so in these places if there is strong support from the local community, Mayors and the locally elected democratic leadership of councils.

As I told the ports when I met them earlier in the year, and as was said in the conversations the Chief Secretary has had with others, we believe there may be opportunities for some levers to be pulled with respect to ports. If they wish to take advantage of opportunities for locally led development corporations or those with a central Government component, we are happy to discuss that and see that moved forward as fast as possible.

We want to see further business-friendly customs arrangements put in place. Proposals for freeports would need to prove that they will genuinely attract inward investment into the United Kingdom and not simply displace growth that might have happened in other parts of the country. It must be an additive policy that makes the country more prosperous and does not simply move jobs and investment from other parts of the United Kingdom.

We are aware of the risks of free zones we see around the world relating to money laundering and other illicit activities—I saw that when I visited freeports, particularly with respect to the art market, which I worked in before being elected. We take note of the G7's Financial Action Task Force. There are important questions that need to be explored and understood, and we must be sure that we overcome those risks before going further.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland for raising an important issue. Personally, I am highly engaged in it, along with the Chief Secretary. We want to see substantive proposals brought forward for us to consider, which can inform the debate and answer some of the questions that I and other Members have raised. How would free zones genuinely be additive and drive forward the prosperity of the whole United Kingdom? How can we overcome some of the disadvantages in terms of criminality and illicit trade that we have seen around the world? From a customs perspective, how would a freeport add something to our business-friendly customs environment that we do not have already, bearing in mind the analysis and comments I have laid out? How can that play a part in our wider strategy to use devices such as development corporations or enterprise zones to help areas seize

economic opportunities, liberalise planning, build a business-friendly vision and attract business leadership to take forward their communities and economies?

This is an interesting and exciting opportunity worthy of further thought and consideration. I look forward to working with colleagues on both sides of the Chamber on it in the future.

2.57 pm

**Mr Simon Clarke:** I thank everyone who spoke in the debate. I particularly thank the Minister for sending out a really encouraging signal that there is serious engagement from the Government. The gauntlet is thrown down to us and the ports sector to make the proposition viable.

The hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) set out a compelling case, which is close to my own heart, for why Teesport is such a great candidate to be a freeport if the initiative gets off the ground. Leaving aside what Harold Macmillan would term a little local difficulty about our positions on Brexit, I welcome the consensus that we have achieved. There is no suggestion that a freeport should, for example, weaken workers' rights. It would be insanity as well as bad practice for us to do anything that took us down that route. This matter is about economic potential, not deregulation in that sense.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) is such a doughty champion. I am so pleased that he set up the all-party group. Obviously, his area, like mine, could benefit enormously from making a go of freeports. He pointed out that the initiative is perfectly designed for northern communities that have been left behind. It is absolutely about embracing the opportunities of Brexit, as he rightly said.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) spoke. It is rare that I get the chance to praise London and the opportunities that it offers. It is true that London is a complex and diverse city. The idea that it is all Bentleys and million-pound homes in Sloane Square is not true. It is important that places like Havering get to benefit from initiatives such as the logistics hub. The hon. Member for Redcar and I are working on promoting such a bid for Teesside—nothing passes without Teesside getting a mention. Logistics hubs are a great idea and Havering seems to me to have many of the characteristics that would make it a successful location.

[MR PETER BONE *in the Chair*]

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) has emerged as the foremost champion of social and economic liberalism within my intake of Conservative MPs. He rightly identifies that we need to be nimble, dynamic and fearless as we leave the European Union. If we are to do that, I think freeports are a great opportunity. I wish him luck working out how to get the sea a little bit closer to North East Derbyshire.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) eloquently set out his party's position on Brexit. He is absolutely right about the importance of EU trade. I draw him back to my point that current EU state aid rules restrict us from creating freeports in a way that would allow them to succeed. He made his own powerful case for Rosyth to form part of a freeport, were such a policy to be initiated. He is certainly right to pay tribute to the work of the UK ports sector in helping us to prepare for today's debate.

The hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) rightly highlighted the importance of EU trade. We struck genuine cross-party consensus that this must not be an opportunity to deregulate things that are important to all of us, including hard-won advances in workers' rights. It did seem slightly ironic that she took the Government to task over the lack of clarity on Brexit. I lose track of the exact position of the Opposition on this point, but it is fair to say that it is difficult for all parties, and we need to bear that in mind.

More broadly, I hope that Labour can find a way to make this policy a part of its platform, as it has enormous potential for many Labour constituencies. The fact that the hon. Member for Redcar is here and the fact that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), a friend whom I admire greatly, is the co-sponsor of the debate, shows that this idea goes to the heart of regenerating places that have had a really raw deal over the last 30 years and have really struggled with the challenges of deindustrialisation. They could potentially benefit enormously from making this policy work. I certainly do not think we need to worry about her colourful suggestion about the transport of weapons of mass destruction. I promise now that Teesport will not become a centre for that—it is the only thing that I will rule out for Teesside.

I turn to the points made by the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick). It was a huge pleasure to welcome him to Skelton a few weeks ago; we had a really good visit. I know he is one of the most thoughtful and effective champions of enterprise in Government and someone who I think will go right to the very top of Government—he certainly deserves to. It is great to hear about his close engagement with the ports sector and he is right that the onus now passes to the sector to come up with workable, serious proposals. We have expanded upon the intellectual framework for why this could work and it is now about getting the granularity of detail that the Government require to make it happen.

Whatever the framework within which we choose to leave the European Union, it must allow the broadest possible powers for future enterprise. That takes me back to my point about Chequers. I really do want to see supply side benefits realised. There is a particular opportunity at a time when the Government have embraced a place-based industrial strategy to make the case for areas like the Humber and South Tees, where there are enormous brownfield sites. I appreciate there are ports that are constrained, such as Dover and Liverpool, but there are others where the potential is unlimited—as much land as is needed can be given. This is something that is exciting and it resonates.

It would be wrong of me to close without paying tribute to the work of Ben Houchen and the whole regeneration initiative, which is making a huge impact cross-party. It is getting people's hopes up in places like South Tees. Sometimes it is not just about changing the economic reality but about changing the intellectual and emotional response to where we are now. We have had one narrative for a long time and hopefully we are starting to get into a much more enterprising and forward-looking mood in our area. This is an exciting and hugely challenging time. There will be great opportunities and pitfalls in the months and years ahead. That is what comes when one takes back control

*[Mr Simon Clarke]*

of policy. Today has crystallised the next steps that we are going to have to take in order to make freeports a serious, workable prospect for our future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the establishment of freeports in the UK.

3.3 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Thursday 11 October 2018

## CABINET OFFICE

### Race Disparity Audit

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington):** At the publication of the race disparity audit a year ago, the Government committed to “explain or change” the issues highlighted on the audit’s website Ethnicity Facts and Figures.

Since October 2017 we have taken action in education, employment, health, criminal justice and:

Provided targeted employment supporting in 20 areas across the UK. The gap between employment rates of working age people in ethnic minority groups and in the whole population is now at a record low.

Taken action on the recommendations of the Lammy review including to increase diversity of prison officer intake; funded development of an education programme to prepare lawyers from a range of backgrounds to apply for judicial office; and extended the range of justice data we provide broken down by ethnicity.

Announced £90 million of funding from dormant bank accounts to support young people facing barriers to employment into work. Applications for the first allocation of this funding are open today to support grass roots organisations in Bradford, Birmingham and Barking and Dagenham.

Started work to tackle disparities in the rate of exclusions in schools and the application of the Mental Health Act.

The audit’s website Ethnicity Facts and Figures has been continually updated and extended to allow the public to see if outcomes are getting better or worse across over 160 topics. We have taken a co-ordinated and strategic approach, led by the race disparity unit in Cabinet Office, which I oversee as chair of the inter-ministerial group.

Today, the Government are announcing further action to see employers adopting fair employment practices which ensure all staff, particularly those from an ethnic minority background, do as well as they are able in terms of recruitment and progression.

Specifically the Government are:

Inviting employers to sign up to a Race at Work Charter, which sets out effective practices that support fairness at work;

Setting new ambitions in key public services to increase the proportion of senior leaders who come from an ethnic minority background;

Taking action through public procurement to encourage Government suppliers to adopt fair employment practices; and

Consulting on how mandatory ethnicity pay reporting can best drive action without placing undue burdens on business.

Select Committees were notified of the publication of the consultation on ethnicity pay reporting and the update on the progress tackling racial disparity in the criminal justice system, and copies of relevant documents have been placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS996]

## TREASURY

### ECOFIN

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):** An informal meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) was held in Vienna on 7 and 8 September 2018. The Council discussed the following:

#### WORKING LUNCH—THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK: ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Based on a presidency issues note, the Council discussed the achievements and future challenges of the European Investment Bank (EIB).

#### WORKING SESSION I

The Council were then joined by Central Bank Governors for the first working session.

#### *Financial stability implications of increasing interest rates*

Following a presentation from the Centre for European Policy Studies, the Council discussed the financial stability implications of increasing interest rates.

#### *The economic potential and risk of crypto assets*

Following a presentation from Bruegel, the Council discussed the economic potential and risks of crypto assets.

#### WORKING SESSION II

#### *MFF 2021-27: Deepening of the economic and monetary union*

The Council discussed issues in the context of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for the period 2021-27 and the deepening of the economic and monetary union. Specifically, the Council held an exchange of views on proposals in relation to the InvestEU programme and the approach for strengthening structural reforms and macroeconomic stabilisation in the eurozone.

#### WORKING SESSION III

#### *Fair taxation of the digital economy*

The Council held an exchange of views on fair taxation of the digital economy.

A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) was held in Luxembourg on 2 October 2018. The UK was represented by Mark Bowman (Director General, International Finance, HM Treasury). The Council discussed the following:

#### *Early morning session*

The Eurogroup President briefed the Council on the outcomes of the 1 October meeting of the Eurogroup, and the European Commission provided an update on the current economic situation in the EU.

#### *VAT “quick-fixes”*

The Council agreed a general approach in regards to: the directive on harmonising and simplifying certain rules in the VAT system and introducing the definitive system for the taxation of trade between member states; the regulation regarding certain exemptions for intra-community transactions; and the regulation regarding certified taxable persons.

*VAT generalised reverse charge mechanism*

The Council agreed a general approach on the VAT generalised reverse charge mechanism.

*Anti-money laundering and prudential supervision*

The Commission presented its amended proposal on improving supervision of the financial sector to ensure that anti-money laundering aspects are fully addressed.

*Current financial services legislative proposals*

The Austrian presidency provided an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

*European semester 2018—lessons learnt*

The Council held an exchange of views on lessons learnt from the European semester 2018.

*Preparation of the G20 meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors and of the IMF annual meetings between 11 and 14 October in Bali, Indonesia*

The Council approved the EU's G20 terms of reference and International Monetary and Financial Committee statement, ahead of the annual meetings in Bali, Indonesia.

*Status of the implementation of financial services legislation*

The Council discussed the status of the implementation of financial services legislation.

[HCWS991]

**ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS****Agriculture and Fisheries Council**

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** The Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place on 15 October in Luxembourg. As the provisional agenda stands, the main focus for fisheries will be a regulation on fixing the fishing opportunities in the Baltic sea for 2019, for which a political agreement is sought.

Council will then hold an exchange of views on the EU-Norway annual consultation for 2019. There will also be an exchange of views on the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

For agriculture, the main item will be a progress report on the regulation on CAP strategic plans. The European Commission will also give a presentation on the G20 agriculture meeting.

[HCWS988]

**FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE****Foreign Affairs Council**

**The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan):** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on 15 October. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP), Federica Mogherini.

The FAC will discuss current affairs, external aspects of migration, Libya, the Central African Republic and Venezuela.

Ministers will adopt the new EU chemical weapons sanctions regime at the FAC. We look forward to early progress on the listing of relevant individuals and entities in due course. This is the first step towards bolstering the EU's capabilities to address hybrid threats and the first in a package of sanctions regimes announced on 5 September. The Prime Minister set out the UK's intentions to pursue new EU sanctions regimes related to chemical weapons, human rights, and cyber, in response to events in Salisbury and a wider pattern of malign activity. The Council will be an opportunity for the UK to call for the speedy adoption of a regime to address malicious cyber-attacks. We are working closely with EU partners to deliver on these priorities.

*External aspects of migration*

The Council will continue the discussions on migration initiated at the June European Council. This will include measures relating to search and rescue in the Mediterranean, regional disembarkation platforms and controlled centres. The UK will seek to ensure that these discussions are placed within the context of a comprehensive or whole of route approach to tackling irregular migration, where appropriate attention is paid to upstream activity and the fight against organised immigration crime (OIC).

*Libya*

Ministers will discuss developments in Libya following the recent deterioration in the security situation that prompted a P5, EU, African Union (AU), Arab League ministerial meeting during UNGA that was chaired by the French Foreign Minister Le Drian. The recent clashes are the most serious outbreak of violence in Tripoli since 2017 and have delayed progress on the constitutional and legal framework needed to enable elections to take place. Given the recent violence, discussions are likely to focus on the security challenges, and the resulting impact on the UN-led political process. We will underline the importance of the international community reaffirming its support to UN Secretary General's Special Representative, (SRSG) Salamé and the UN-led political process, and emphasise that elections must be preceded by the necessary political, security and technical preparations.

*Central African Republic*

Ministers will discuss the security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) and ongoing efforts to support the CAR Government achieve peace and stability. We will continue to emphasise the need for a co-ordinated and inclusive approach by all international partners. The AU facilitated peace process remains vital to ending the violence in CAR.

*Venezuela*

The Council will discuss the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Venezuela and the impact of Venezuelan migration on neighbouring countries and the wider region. The FAC will also consider what further actions might be possible to complement existing EU assistance. The FAC may also discuss a possible EU response when President Maduro begins his next term of office in January 2019; the EU stated that the presidential elections of May 2018 lacked any credibility and called for the holding of fresh presidential elections.

*Council conclusions*

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on connecting Asia and Europe, the Central African Republic as well as approve a new regime on chemical weapons.

[HCWS990]

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE****Cyber Resilience in Health and Care**

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):** My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Lord O'Shaughnessy) has made the following written statement:

In February 2018 the Government published “Securing cyber resilience in health and care: A progress update”, which set out the actions taken to improve the cyber-security of the health and care system before and after last year’s largest ever WannaCry global ransomware attack, as well as our plans for the future. Today we are publishing a further update on progress and development of our future plans. In particular since February we have:

increased our investment in securing local infrastructure in 2017-18 to over £60 million;

signed a Windows 10 licensing agreement with Microsoft which will allow local NHS organisations to save money, reduce potential vulnerabilities and increase cyber-resilience; agreed £150 million of investment over the next three years; procured a new Cyber Security Operations Centre boosting the national capability to prevent, detect and respond to cyber-attacks;

launched the data security and protection toolkit;

agreed our plans to implement the recommendations of the Chief Information Officer for Health and Care’s review of the May 2017 WannaCry attack;

supported 25 local NHS organisations to improve their cyber-resilience via the NHS Digital “Blue Teams” pilot and;

estimated the costs of the WannaCry attack.

NHS Digital is continuing to work closely with local areas to build resilience. This work forms part of the data and cyber security programme being led by the Department of Health and Social Care with its arm’s length bodies to improve the cyber-security of the health and care system.

Copies of the “Securing cyber resilience in health and care—progress update October 2018” have been placed in the Library of the House. It can also be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-cyber-resilience-in-health-and-care-october-2018-update>.

[HCWS992]

**HOME DEPARTMENT****Immigration**

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid):** The Government deeply regret what has happened to the Windrush generation and are determined to right the wrongs they have experienced under successive Governments. The Home Office has put in place a series of measures to support those affected, one of which is the design of a compensation scheme to compensate

those members of the Windrush generation who have faced difficulties in establishing their status under the immigration system.

On 19 July I published a consultation paper on the design of this compensation scheme for those who have suffered a loss as a result of these difficulties. This consultation was due to be open for a period of 12 weeks, closing today (11 October).

I am keen to ensure that the consultation exercise is thorough and allows sufficient opportunity for everyone who wants to respond, to do so. Martin Forde QC, the independent adviser appointed to oversee the development of the scheme, has written to me asking for the consultation period to be extended. This is based on his engagement with various community groups and the roadshows he has undertaken in recent weeks where people have said they need more time to respond. There are also a range of events over the coming weeks of Black History Month which would provide for a greater input into the consultation phase.

I have therefore agreed to extend the consultation by five weeks to 16 November. As I have said before I want to move quickly but carefully in establishing the scheme and this short extension balances the need to give people more time to respond to the consultation while minimising undue delay to the launch of the scheme.

Following the consultation my priority is to establish a scheme which will pay appropriate compensation as soon as possible. In the meantime, we will continue to offer people direct support to establish their immigration status.

My officials have already put several measures and initiatives in place to help those who are concerned about benefits, housing or employment. We believe that using established avenues of support is the best way of ensuring those in immediate need get the necessary support right now. Additional measures for those in immediate need include a dedicated team for vulnerable people within the Windrush taskforce, which has so far assisted over 450 people where an urgent need for support or advice has been identified; a “Fast-Track” service with the Department for Work and Pensions to confirm status and residence and arrange access to benefits; steps to secure accommodation with local authorities for those identified as homeless; and interim guidance to employers and landlords. We have also reached an agreement with Citizens Advice to provide bespoke professional advice, including debt advice, to anyone experiencing immediate financial problems.

There may be some urgent and exceptional cases where it is right to consider whether individual circumstances warrant a payment to be made before the compensation scheme is in place. I have asked my officials to develop a framework for considering such cases and I will publish that policy in due course.

[HCWS993]

**Immigration Health Surcharge**

**The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes):** Our NHS is always there when you need it, paid for by British taxpayers. We welcome long-term migrants using the NHS, but believe it is right that they make a fair

contribution to its long-term sustainability. That was why we introduced the immigration health surcharge (IHS) in April 2015.

The IHS applies to non-European economic area (EEA) nationals subject to immigration control seeking to reside in the UK to work, study, or join family members for more than six months. Those who pay the charge may access the NHS on the same basis as UK residents for the duration of their lawful stay, i.e. they receive NHS care generally free of charge but may be charged for services a permanent resident would also pay for, such as prescription charges in England. The IHS has raised over £600 million and this money has been distributed to the Department of Health and Social Care and the health ministries in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for health spending, in line with the Barnett formula.

The IHS is currently set at £200 per annum for most temporary migrant categories, with a discounted rate of £150 per annum for students and the youth mobility category. These rates have not changed since the IHS was introduced.

In February, the Government announced their intention to double the IHS. This followed a review by the Department of Health and Social Care of the evidence regarding the average cost to the NHS of treating surcharge payers. That review found that the average annual cost of NHS usage by those paying the surcharge is around £470 and that doubling the IHS could generate an additional £220 million a year for the NHS across the UK.

Today we have laid before Parliament in accordance with section 38 of the Immigration Act 2014, the Immigration (Health Charge) (Amendment) Order 2018. The order, which is subject to the affirmative procedure, seeks to double the IHS to £400 per annum. Students, as well as those on the youth mobility scheme, will continue to receive a discounted rate of £300. The order also makes some minor technical amendments to provide greater clarity about exchange rates, when payments are made in foreign currencies.

The proposed amount is still below full average cost recovery level and remains a good deal for those seeking to live in the UK temporarily. These changes do not affect permanent residents, who are not required to pay the IHS. Certain vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers and modern slavery victims are exempt from paying the IHS. Short-term migrants (including those on visitor visas) and those without permission to be in the UK are generally charged for secondary care treatment by the NHS at the point of access.

Ministers in the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care will shortly host information sessions for interested MPs and Peers.

[HCWS995]

### **Cannabis-based Products: Medicinal Use**

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid):** Today, the Government are laying the Misuse of Drugs (Amendments) (Cannabis and Licence Fees) (England, Wales and Scotland) Regulations 2018 (the 2018 regulations) in the House. These regulations reschedule cannabis-based products for medicinal use and will come into force on 1 November 2018.

On 19 June, I announced a two-part review to look at the scheduling of cannabis-related medicinal products under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 (the 2001 regulations). I have been clear that my intention was always to ensure that patients have access to the most appropriate course of medical treatment. I stressed the importance of acting swiftly to ensure that where medically appropriate, these products could be available to be prescribed to patients. I have been clear that this should be achieved at the earliest opportunity while ensuring that the appropriate safeguards were in place to minimise the risks of misuse and diversion.

Building on the expert advice we have received, first from the chief medical adviser to the UK Government and then the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), the regulations we have laid today give effect to my commitments. I outline in this statement the main features of our approach.

The 2018 regulations introduce a definition of “cannabis-based product for medicinal use in humans”. Only products meeting this definition will be rescheduled to schedule 2 to the 2001 regulations and de-designated from the 2015 designation order. Any product which does not satisfy this definition will remain a schedule 1 drug and only be available under a Home Office licence.

To constitute a “cannabis-based product for medicinal use in humans”, a product must satisfy three requirements:

- It needs to be a preparation or product which contains cannabis, cannabis resin, cannabidiol or a cannabidiol derivative;
- It is produced for medicinal use in humans and;

- Is a medicinal product, or a substance or preparation for use as an ingredient of, or in the production of an ingredient of, a medicinal product.

While the evidence base further develops and clinical expertise builds, the Government believe it is important that access to these products is strictly controlled so as to prevent unintended misuse, harm and diversion. The 2001 regulations therefore only allow three access routes for the order, supply and use of these products by patients. These are as follows:

- A special medicinal product for use in accordance with a prescription or direction of a doctor (who has made the decision to prescribe) on the specialist register of the General Medical Council;

- An investigational medicinal product without marketing authorisation for use in a clinical trial or;

- A medicinal product with a marketing authorisation.

This brings these products explicitly into the existing medicines framework. There are well-established mechanisms for the supply of unlicensed medicines to patients with exceptional needs. Unlicensed medicines of this sort are known as “specials”. They can only be manufactured in or imported into the UK by a manufacturer or wholesale dealer that has a licence from the MHRA to do so and are expected to meet standards of good manufacturing practice (GMP).

The decision to prescribe is only restricted to a doctor on the specialist register of the General Medical Council where the cannabis-based product is an unlicensed “special” medicinal product for use by a specific patient. Once a product is licensed by the MHRA, it will be available for prescription in the same way as any other schedule 2 drug.

I have been consistently clear that I have no intention of legalising the recreational use of cannabis. To take account of the particular risk of misuse of cannabis by smoking and the operational impacts on enforcement

agencies, the 2018 regulations continue to prohibit smoking of cannabis, including of cannabis-based products for medicinal use in humans.

Until recently, licences for schedule 1 drugs were generally issued for research purposes. As we have seen in recent cases, there may be exceptional circumstances which would require a schedule 1 licence to be issued for medicinal or treatment purposes. In the exceptional event that an individual will need to be issued a schedule 1 licence for treatment, the 2018 regulations will ensure that the Secretary of State can determine that no fee should be paid in that case.

Until the changes come into force on 1 November 2018, the independent expert panel, set up to provide me with clinical advice on individual licence applications, will remain in place to consider any application received before then.

These provisions will apply to England, Wales and Scotland. My officials continue to engage closely with the Department for Health in Northern Ireland, which intends to mirror these legislative amendments.

These regulations are not an end in themselves. The ACMD will be conducting a long-term review of cannabis and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has been commissioned to provide advice for clinicians by October next year. The Government will monitor the impact of the policy closely as the evidence base develops and review when the ACMD provides its final advice.

Further explanation of the legislative changes is set out in the explanatory memorandum to the regulations.

[HCWS994]

### Immigration Rules

**The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes):** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is today laying before Parliament a statement of changes in immigration rules. This is the latest in the regular, half-yearly series of changes to the immigration rules. The changes have three main purposes.

First, they implement the next phase of the roll-out of the EU settlement scheme for resident EU citizens and their family members to obtain UK immigration status. The immigration rules for the scheme, set out in appendix EU, came into force on 28 August 2018, for the purposes of an initial private beta test phase, involving 12 NHS trusts and three universities in north-west England. This phase has enabled us successfully to test some of the functionality and processes of the scheme in a live environment.

I have today written to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, with our early findings from the initial private beta phase and I will place a copy of that letter in the Library of the House. We will continue to monitor the findings from that phase and will publish a report on those findings, including how they will inform the scheme's development, as we move into a second private beta phase in November.

Overall, the technology performed well, with some minor improvements identified to improve the overall customer experience, and feedback from applicants on the speed and ease of the application process has been very positive. The initial private beta phase has enabled

us to test components of the online application process. We now need to test that online process as an integrated, end-to-end process.

We are therefore moving ahead with a second private beta phase, which, as set out in this statement of changes, will run from 1 November to 21 December 2018. It will also significantly scale up the testing, including, on a voluntary basis and with the agreement of the devolved Administrations, staff in the higher education, health and social care sectors across the UK. This phase will also include some vulnerable individuals being supported by a small number of local authorities and civil society organisations so that we can test the operation of the scheme for those with support needs. I am grateful to all the organisations and their staff taking part in the testing and thereby helping us to establish the EU settlement scheme as effectively as possible.

We currently expect that the further phased implementation of the scheme will be secured through further immigration rules changes to be laid before Parliament in December 2018 (for implementation in January 2019), and in early March 2019, so that the scheme will be fully open by our exit from the EU.

Secondly, further to my written ministerial statement of 13 September 2018, *Official Report*, column 36WS (HCWS961), this statement of changes introduces a form of leave to remain for those children transferred to the UK as part of the Calais camp clearance to reunite with family between October 2016 and July 2017 and who do not qualify for international protection (i.e. refugee status or humanitarian protection). It is our view that all those 549 children transferred from Calais to the UK to reunite with family should be able to remain here with their family members. We do not consider that it would be in their best interests as children to separate them from their families, having received significant support from the UK authorities to reunite and integrate here.

Thirdly, this statement of changes amends the immigration rules on the requirements for a valid application to support the operation of the new application process in UK Visas and Immigration, and specifies evidence for medical exemption from knowledge of language and/or life in the UK requirements. The new application process will mean that customers in the UK applying to extend their stay or apply for citizenship will be able to submit key documents and personal information in a more secure way with the support of designated staff. UK Visas and Immigration will no longer generally handle physical evidence when considering a case, so the majority of customers will be able to retain their passport, and all customers will be able to retain their supporting evidence as part of the application process. UK Visas and Immigration aims to deliver a world-class customer experience that is competitive, flexible and accessible; and the launch of these new, more efficient front-end services this November is a big step towards that goal.

[HCWS997]

### TRANSPORT

#### HS2 Working Draft Environmental Study

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** I would like to update the House on the progress of High Speed 2.

High Speed 2 will be the backbone of our country's rail network. The first major railway to be built north of London for 150 years, it will improve connectivity between our major cities and increase rail capacity where it is most needed by adding extra services onto our busiest routes. Once completed, HS2 is planned to serve around 300,000 people each day. No alternative transport option can achieve such an increase in rail capacity and connectivity.

HS2 is truly national in its scope and can be a transformative project for our country. Its vision is to be a catalyst for economic growth.

HS2 Ltd was set-up in January 2009. The progress it is making on the project is outlined in its annual report and accounts for 2017-18, published on 23 July 2018, and its corporate plan for 2018-21, published on 19 June 2018. In September 2018 HS2 Ltd also published its skills, employment and education strategy which sets out an aim to help the next generation develop the technical skills not only to design and build HS2, but to deliver the project pipeline of the UK's future infrastructure and leave a lasting skills legacy for the country. The training, apprenticeships and foundation degrees offered at the national college for high speed rail, with campuses in Doncaster and Birmingham, are central to our strategy.

HS2 is already delivering economic benefits across the UK. Around 7,000 jobs are already supported by the project and designing and building the railway is forecast at peak to support around 30,000 jobs, including 2,000 apprentices. Around 2,000 businesses from across the UK have already been awarded contracts to support the project.

HS2 is not an end in itself, but rather a means to achieving balanced growth, investing in transport to unlock jobs, regeneration and housing, and creating a more prosperous national economy. In July 2018 outgoing HS2 Ltd chair Sir David Higgins published his report "HS2: Realising the Potential" demonstrating that the benefits of HS2 are already being realised across the UK. Places on the route, including Leeds, Manchester, Toton and Crewe, have outlined bold plans in their growth strategies. Birmingham, the heart of the HS2 network, in particular is already seeing an impact from HS2 in terms of jobs, business relocation and regeneration. The Government also recently announced plans for the creation of a new, locally-led development body for the area around Toton in the east midlands.

The development of these strategies was a recommendation from the HS2 growth taskforce report in 2014. We continue to work with places on the HS2 route on the delivery of their plans and undertake periodic assessments of progress to ensure the full potential of HS2 is being realised.

#### *HS2 Phase 1*

On Phase 1 (West Midlands to London), design and enabling works are ongoing. Major procurements have included: issuing an invitation-to-tender for rolling stock; Lend Lease has been appointed as the master development partner for Euston station, to work with HS2 Ltd, the London Borough of Camden and others to develop a master plan for the sustainable mixed use development at the Euston station site; and HS2 Ltd has awarded design contracts for the four new high speed stations in Birmingham and London.

#### *HS2 Phase 2a*

In 2015 the Government announced their intention to accelerate the delivery of Phase 2a (West Midlands to Crewe). The hybrid Bill passed its Second Reading on 30 January 2018 by 295 votes to 12; the Select Committee published its Second Special Report of Session in July 2018, to which the Government will respond in the autumn. The legislation will return to the House in spring 2019 for further consideration.

#### *HS2 Phase 2b and the working draft environmental statement*

On Phase 2b (Crewe to Manchester and West Midlands to Leeds), we are making further significant progress. This phase will complete the full "Y network" and deliver the full benefits of the scheme in terms of capacity, connectivity and economic growth across the UK. In July 2017, I confirmed the route from Crewe to Manchester and Birmingham to Leeds. I am today announcing a consultation by HS2 Ltd on the working draft environmental statement for Phase 2b, which is a key part of preparing the future hybrid Bill to seek powers for its construction. The consultation will run for 10 weeks.

The working draft environmental statement gives those affected the chance to review and comment on initial assessments of the environmental impacts from HS2 Phase 2b. It shows the consolidated construction boundary, proposed construction methodologies at each site, construction and operational phase plans, environmental mitigation and land take to support important work such as habitat replacement, rail heads and construction traffic routes. Responses to the consultation will allow HS2 Ltd to improve further its understanding of the impacts, risks and concerns that residents and businesses may have concerning the route. The consultation outcome will inform the design, mitigation and environmental impact assessment of Phase 2b ahead of the statutory environmental statement, which will be published as part of the hybrid Bill for Phase 2b.

The working draft environmental statement includes a non-technical summary; 28 community area reports; and a working draft equalities impact assessment which assesses the impact of the proposed Phase 2b scheme against the requirements of the public sector equality duty. To support the consultation, HS2 Ltd will be arranging 30 consultations events in the community areas along the Phase 2b route.

It is important to note that the working draft environmental statement is based on the Phase 2b route confirmed in summer 2017. A range of further potential local changes to the route, in particular to facilitate Northern Powerhouse Rail, are under development. Last year we provided £300 million to future proof HS2 for the proposed Northern Powerhouse Rail, which is a major strategic rail programme designed to transform connectivity between the key economic centres of the north. I expect to consult on such changes separately next year. In particular, the working draft environmental statement shows an "HS2 only" design for stations at Manchester airport and Manchester Piccadilly. Transport for the North's strategic business case for Northern Powerhouse Rail is due in late 2018 and we will consider how these designs could be modified to support future plans for Northern Powerhouse Rail.

In order to reflect changes to parliamentary timetables after the 2017 General Election and lessons from the development of Phase 1, and to allow Northern Powerhouse

Rail interfaces to be properly explored for the Phase 2b hybrid Bill, I am updating the intended deposit date for the HS2 Phase 2b hybrid Bill to mid-2020. The intended opening date for Phase 2b remains unchanged at 2033.

This update on progress follows a previous update in July 2017 when we announced the Phase 2b route. The Government will ensure that Parliament is provided with further updates on HS2's progress at least once a year.

Copies of the working draft environmental statement, non-technical summary and the working draft equalities impact assessment have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS989]





# Ministerial Corrections

*Thursday 11 October 2018*

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Listed Sporting Events

*The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on Listed Sporting Events on 11 July 2018.*

**Margot James:** Our public service broadcasters spent £515 million on sport **last year**, delivering just over 3,000 hours of content; only factual programmes have more money invested in them. They contribute a huge amount to grassroots sport, with more than half a billion pounds flowing from broadcasters to national governing bodies, which helps sports to increase their grassroots appeal and gives children the opportunity to try new sports when otherwise they might not have been able to do so.

*[Official Report, 11 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 370WH.]*

*Letter of correction from the Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries:*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Keighley (John Grogan) during the Westminster Hall debate on Listed Sporting Events.

The correct response should have been:

**Margot James:** Our public service broadcasters spent £515 million on sport **in 2016**, delivering just over 3,000 hours of content; only factual programmes have more money invested in them. They contribute a huge amount to grassroots sport, with more than half a billion pounds flowing from broadcasters to national governing bodies, which helps sports to increase their

grassroots appeal and gives children the opportunity to try new sports when otherwise they might not have been able to do so.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Care Homes: CCTV

*The following are extracts from a Westminster Hall debate on Care Homes: CCTV on 5 September 2018:*

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):** We also expect those providing the service, local authorities and the Care Quality Commission to take swift action where anyone alleges poor care, neglect or abuse. We have backed that up with more than £9 billion of investment in the sector in the past three years, which equates to an 8% increase in funding. That incredible amount of money highlights the challenge we face in the sector.

*[Official Report, 5 September 2018, Vol. 646, c. 98WH.]*

*Letter of correction from Caroline Dinéage:*

An error has been identified during the speech I gave on Care Homes: CCTV.

The correct statement should have been:

**Caroline Dinéage:** We have backed that up with more than £9 billion of investment in the sector **over three years**, which equates to an 8% increase in funding.

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):** In the last three years, we have increased funding by £9.4 billion, which equates to an 8% increase.

*[Official Report, 5 September 2018, Vol. 646, c. 98WH.]*

*Letter of correction from Caroline Dinéage:*

An error has been identified during the speech I gave on Care Homes: CCTV.

The correct statement should have been:

**Caroline Dinéage:** **Over three years, we are increasing** funding by £9.4 billion, which equates to an 8% increase.

# ORAL ANSWERS

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**not later than  
Thursday 18 October 2018**

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